鮮血の
エルフ
Elvenblood
His sword is cast by her chain.
The war is colored by his pain.
Wrath to earth, gashes to ashes, rust to dust.
藤原祐
YU FUJIWARA
Illustration kona
電撃文庫

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「きみしかいないんだ、イミナ。これは、きみじゃなきゃ駄目なんだ」
シルジス＝エンドヴェール
年齢▶20 種族▶エルフ
エンドヴェール氏族長家の長子にして、妖精族の王子。エリスの兄であり、イミナの親友。
「あなたの実力を確かめさせてはもらえませんか？」
ミリフィカ＝ユサラ＝アストゼルレン
年齢▶18 種族▶人間
ミドガルズ皇国の姫君にして、ユサラ教練学校の総代。
「僕は、エルフどもの心臓に剣を突き立てたいんだ」
イミナ＝ハイマティエ
年齢▶18 種族▶人間
東方の辺境、サライド村に生まれ育った少年。エリスとシルジスの幼馴染。
「イミナの方がいい。イミナの方が、私にはもっと大事。だから……私のすべてを、あなたにあげます」
エリス＝エンドヴェール
年齢▶18 種族▶エルフ
エンドヴェール氏族長家の娘にして、妖精族の姫。
Elvenblood Character Profile

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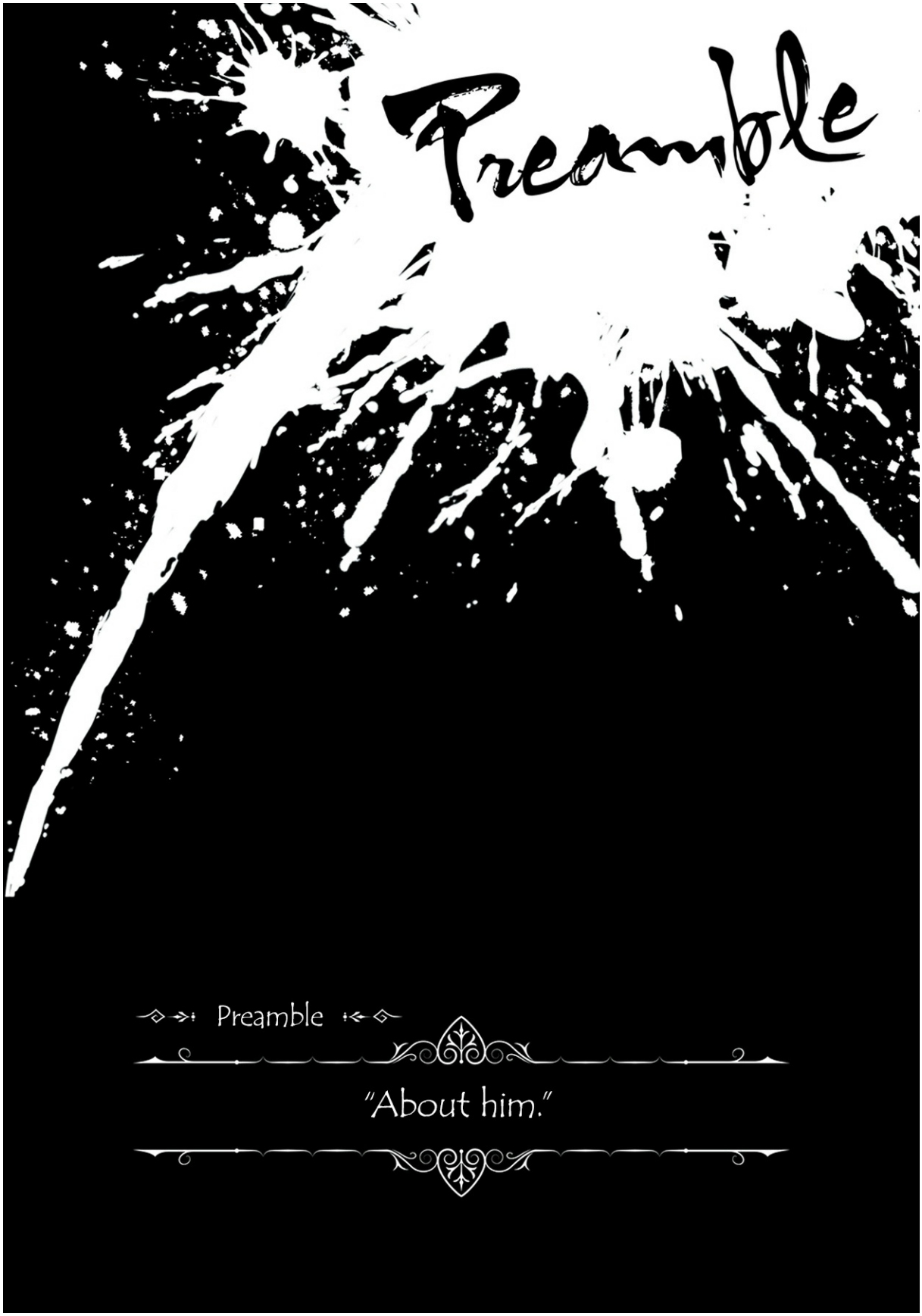


Evaluating something based on bundling what others talk about it is not a very wise action.

Someone said so, it's that kind of thing. Certain someone said, yeah, that's how it is. Someone

else said so, so that's it. Certain someone elsewhere said so, I thought it's like that, I knew it ——no matter how many voices gather, they won't approach the essence of the subject, in other words, even the evaluation of numerous people doesn't mean they have seen through the truth. It doesn't seem like it had come from analysis and criticism. That's because it's difficult to say it's objective, just an aggregation of subjectivity.

However, it's also the truth that some things in the world can only be observed subjectively.

The observers' subjective views and words are spun together, compiled, then organized and subjectively understood by the readers. It's not a very wise action, but humans being just humans do not possess God's eye, so if they wish to relay something, they can only do it this way. The only one possessing truly objective point of view is God alone.

That's why, about this time's subject "Him"—— Imina Haimatie, I think of trying to speak of him in this manner.

Of course, if I look impartially at him, his standpoint is that of a human so it's clear that it'll be far from being an unbiased perspective. On the other hand, it's not like I know everything about him, there is much missing information. But still, rather than being satisfied with talk of those spreading rumours and gossip, I'm proud of being able to properly describe his appearance.

With that said, rather than speaking of my personal impressions, using what I have heard so far, it would be better to raise the evaluation of him in the surroundings. The term "better" in this case, means it's "better" for me, it's more convenient. It would be easier to speak this way.

Now then. These days, in the Royal Capital one can hear voices calling him a hero.

He had achieved numerous feats of valour in the Second Elven War as part of the "Golden Wolf Knights" attacking force. Able to slay elven generals in battle, all alone, he became the poster brave knight of the Empire.

On the other hand, there are people who mock him for being overestimated.

Although he decapitated the enemy general, it was not clear whether it happened thanks to his own abilities and in the first place, it was not a military exploit sufficient to affect the entire war. In the end, he was just a single commoner soldier her highness Princess Milifica is pleased with.

As a matter of fact, as far as their words go, I don't think either off them are correct.

He has succeeded in defeating many enemies. He subjugated a number of demons and magical beasts surpassing everyone else. The earlier mentioned elves——the fairy tribe that has power to devastate troops of hundred humans by themselves——he achieved the feat of defeating them in fight one-on-one.

But on the other hand, he always is in the middle of a losing battle.

While it is known well enough, he himself has never boasted of his military exploits. No, he didn't even recognize the credit for them.

While I do realized it is rude and can be misunderstood, despite being commoners——our "Golden Wolf Knights" leader, her highness Milifica Yusala Astozellen is concerned with him,

who had descended from the commoners.

However, the not-so exaggerated evaluation of a hero, is in the end just something that's spread in the Imperial Capital far from the battlefield, just something people spoken about by those know him only from the rumours. Those who have seen him in the battlefield embrace different kind of feelings.

That is, dread.

In fact, even among Golden Wolf Knights, most of the soldiers are afraid of him. Despite being acquainted with him I'm incredibly fearful of him. Actually it makes me, who has received the great title of the Golden Wolf Knights support troops captain, feel like a timid little girl.

His way of valiantly fighting the approaching crisis is cruel and cold. While certainly he is incredibly strong, but despite that it's incredibly risky, in the middle of fight he seems to enjoy himself while also it feels tragic——he is fraught with contradictions, and that is why——because he is fraught with contradictions, that he fills people with dread. The fact that some of the troop members have likened him to a madman is also a fact. That he is a berserker with a broken heart.

But, I think that too, is merely their one-sided impression.

The soldiers judge him only by how he appears on the battlefield. Speaking in more detail, it is not well known. With what feelings he faces war, with what feelings he wields the sword and, *with what feelings he fights elves*, that is.

Therefore, those who know about these to a certain extent——the ones who are closer to him, hold different feelings towards him.

For example, respect.

For example, esteem.

For example, admiration.

For example, gratitude.

For example, pity.

For example, affection.

And these men and women, think of him like that.

They said: "His sword is incredibly sharp. As a swordsman I can't lose to him."

They said: "That person is really amazing. One day, I want to fight together with him side by side."

They said: "He's doing really well actually. Thanks to him we somehow survive."

They said: "Our lives were saved by him. That's why one day, we'll use our lives for his sake."

They said: "It should be more happy. Sometimes it's too hard to watch."

They said: "He's the core of the knights troop. There's no more words required to evaluate him."

I too, feel the same as these people.

Calling him a hero is certainly right.

Honestly, I can't deny he can be called a berserker with a broken heart.

But to us, he——is a warrior worthy of respect, owner of astounding swordsmanship, an invaluable companion, the person who had saved our lives, person who lives a sad life of sharpening himself for combat——he, who is surrounded by numerous independent evaluations can be described in very simple words.

Namely, an important friend.

All of us, love Imina Haimatie.

With that said——.

Despite the complete evaluation of the friend of ours, it still feels as if there was smoke wrapping around him.

To those who are reading this note——I don't know whether it's someone from tomorrow or the posterity——it's doubtful whether you shall understand him.

That is why, here, I want to quote a certain someone's words.

The girl who is the captain of our Golden Wolf Knights' transportation corps, the childhood friend of Imina Haimatie——Ellis Iivi's evaluation of him.

She has spent her childhood with him, grew up together with him, overcame the tragedy of Salaido village with him, joined the war with him, and is the woman that rushes through the battlefield by his side. In other words, she was the one who was the closest and spent the longest time with him, someone who's connected to him with difficult ties.

Miss Ellis' words are the most subjective out of all of ours.

However, in fact——it is her words that might be the closest to the truth, is what I think. Rather than a bundle of subjective opinions, a single subjective opinion exceeds them. While ironic, it

might be the way of the world.

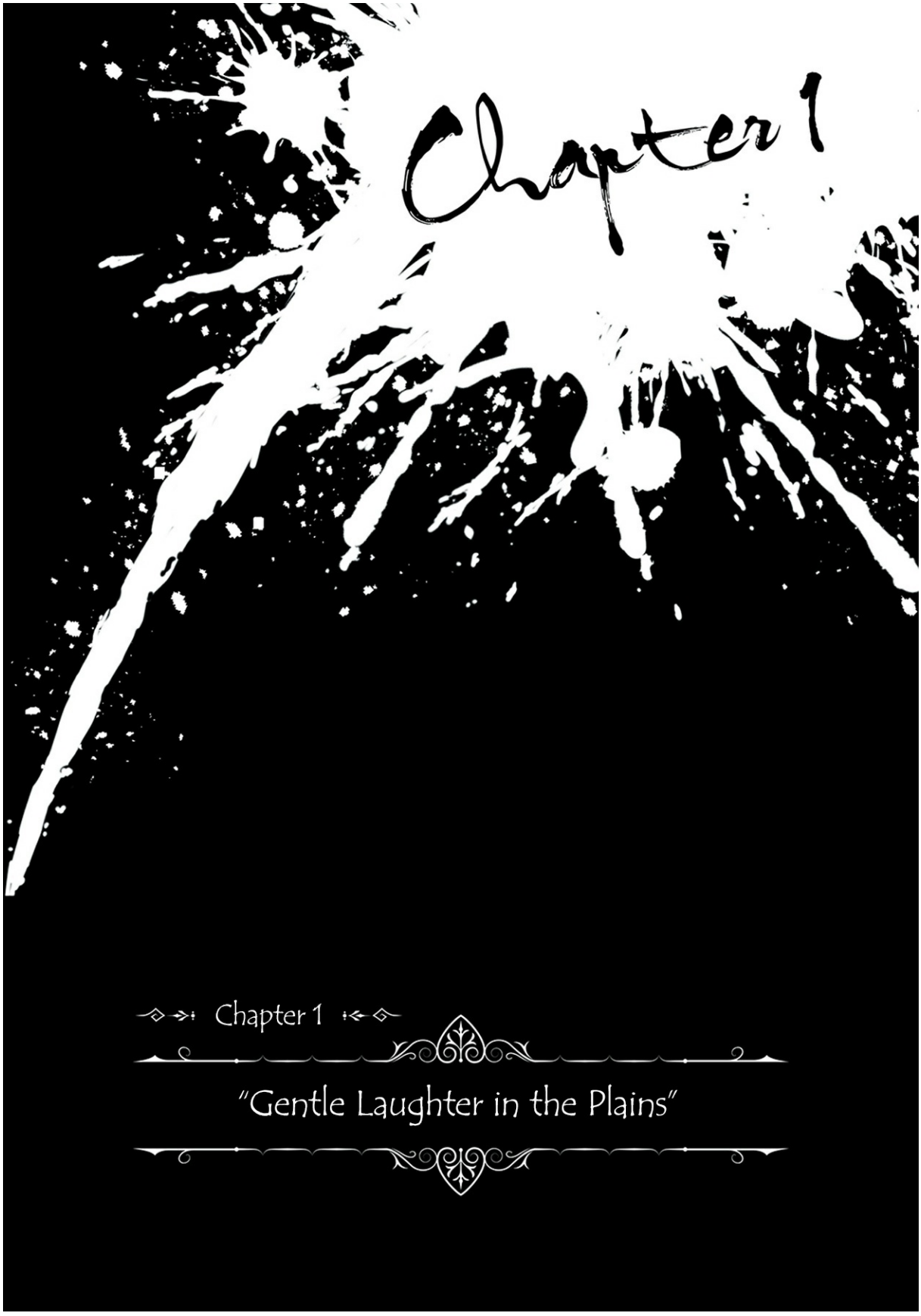
She said.

Imina hasn't changed since long ago.

He's gentle, pure, has a cute smile——and is my beloved person.

Written down by Golden Wolf Knights Support Troop's Captain, Laimi Selea-Shutimeryl.

Excerpt from the heavy memoir lexicon called "Journal and Testament".



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The first half of the year 1499 in the Empire's calendar had passed.

Next year is year 1500. The once-in-hundred years era festival. Apparently the preparations are already under way in the Imperial City. Half a year was still remaining, but everyone was already a in restless mood.

But, in a remote village there wasn't much talk related to that.

The only things known from the imperial capital were rumours from the coming pedlars, adults didn't talk about these positively. The children wanted to go to the imperial capital to see the festival and made a commotion, so adults were troubled——after all, this place was near the border with territory of the elves. It takes a month of travelling in a horse-drawn carriage to reach the imperial capital, one couldn't just go there so casually.

Of course, even in the village they celebrated the era festival. But, it was mostly just splurging and arranging feasts, playing musical instruments around the bonfire and modest dancing over the night, there was absolutely no need to prepare a large-scaled event six months before it begins.

The villagers lived their lives like they always did.

That's why, he——Imina Haimatie too, like usual, did his best with his everyday sword practice.

One boy was short, reminiscent of an agile beast.

The other boy was tall, like a beautiful statue.

The wooden sword the short boy held was short and wide, it mimicked a falchion for duelling.

What the tall boy held was a thin and flexible wooden sabre that mimicked one with a long handle.

The wooden sword was wildly driven forward, swung backwards and then slashed upwards. The wooden sabre that had stood against it had parried the attacks with splendid swing, thrust in counter-attack and cleaved sharply.

This contest——or rather, this match, had continued for about ten minutes.

A few tens of metres away sheep and cows were peacefully feasting on grass on the a small hill's pasture.

Sitting down on the side was a girl, acting as the referee. While she seemed to be diligently watching the outcome of the battle, the fingertips of her left hand out of boredom stroked the stems of milk-vetch that grew there. I don't know what's so interesting in that, boys are strange... she must have been thinking.

Not taking notice of the girl's feelings, blood rushed to the two enthusiastic boys' heads. Squeezing their lips tightly from nervousness, they seemed to be happily smiling.

However, the match was nearing its end.

The petite boy's attack with his wooden sword from above, using all the strength he had, was critical. It was brilliantly parried, because of the missed attack using the entire body weight, the petite boy lost his sense of balance. However, he held out and rebuilt his posture, when he raised his head the opponent was not in front of him. Feeling a presence behind him he hurriedly mowed with the wooden sword behind him, but the sloppy attack had no way of hitting. The blade cut the air, his upper body twisted too much and had turned stiff. His opponent was calm. The wooden sabre had casually, with minimum amount of movement pointed the point of the sword at the short boy's throat.

The passage of arms had ended with this.

"All right, that's enough!"

Loudly, the girl instructed the end of it.

"Match concluded, that's enough right?"

Her gaze was slightly mean and teasing, that's why the petite boy——Imina, only just glanced at her.

Breathing roughly, he declared.

"...it's my loss."

Not towards the girl, towards the enemy that has defeated him.

The point of the wooden sabre had quietly retracted.

Taking step back gracefully——in a charming follow-through——lowering his waist, the opponent who fought with Imina had smiled lightly.

"It wasn't too bad."

"What was! I felt like I was at your mercy."

With a contrasting rudeness, Imina squat down and pierced the meadow with his wooden sword. Giving in to frustration, he crumpled and disturbed his dark red hair to look like a bird's nest.

"There was sharpness to your sword. If you hit faster, even I would have it hard to dispose of it."

The words returned were humble and at the same time cold. They hit the enemy's appearance.

He was a handsome and beautiful boy.

Long and narrow eyes, orderly eyelashes, slim nasal bridge, thin lips, narrow chin and wide shoulders. Silver hair like moonlight reflected on the lake, with exception of his above average

height, he was beautiful enough to be mistaken for a woman.

From the features itself he seemed the same age as thirteen year old Imina.

But, *that's only when compared to a human*.

Unlike the human Imina, he was from a fairy tribe. In other words, an elf.

The ears peeking out from his loose hair were longer than those of human beings, their tips were sharp like needles. His hair colour was silver, a common hair colour among elves. Also, the appearance of elves was younger than their actual age.

He——Shirjis Endveil was three years older than Imina, sixteen year's old.

"Ah damn it, I lost again!"

Stretching his both legs, Imina shouted towards the clear blue sky.

And he looked up at the elf boy who stood quietly.

"I just continue losing, to you."

"My body too, is still immature, I can't let myself be overtaken. ...but honestly, as compared to the past your swordsmanship is much more splendid. I can't let my guard down."

Shirjis advanced a step forward with a smile and sat down next to Imina.

The girl who acted as the referee, as if to follow him, had joined them.

"Really? Shirjis, you don't have to be considerate with him."

Imina made a deep scowl.

"Oh shut up, sister."

The girl's name was Uruha Haimatie, Imina's older sister.

This year she'll be sixteen years old, same age as Shirjis. She had a neat atmosphere around her, bright red hair and shapely lips, narrow eyes and sleek limbs. Despite the mature and beautiful enough appearance for everyone in the village to lavish her with praise, her mean personality ruined it all——at the very least Imina had evaluated her so.

"I'm not being considerate. In today's match too there were many times I was in danger."

"As for me, I don't want you to lose."

Flirting with him, Uruha sat down beside Shirjis.

And, across him, towards the younger brother——she had sent a teasing glance towards Imina.

"In the first place, no matter how much a human struggles they can't win against an elf. You have organic necromancy. If Shirjis was to use evocation, you'd become muuch more stronger than now right? Even if Imina had a magic sword that could be used as an object of necromancy,

there's no way he could keep up with your basic movements."

"That's not the problem."

Imina without a thought let out a rough voice.

"This is a match between two men, evocation doesn't matter! As if a woman would understand."

He didn't like water being poured on the match between him and Shirjis.

With that said though, Uruha's words were correct.

The organic necromancy only elves can handle, use the power of the earth and all creation that flows in the spirit veins——incorporate the spirit into their bodies and strengthen their own flesh with it. Humans who have much lower spirit resistance than elves are unable of performing this technique. Their muscle strength, eyesight and reflexes seem to be improved by several times.

If his basic physical abilities are strengthened even more, the difference between them will grow more and more. Imina and Shirjis can compete like this during practice because Shirjis doesn't use the elves' organic necromancy.

Of course, it wasn't his compassion.

There was no meaning in using evocation. When competing, one has to put in effort. The training of the body and skill themselves. It's pure strength as compared to cheating.

It's been many years since he started practising with Shirjis. Ever since they were small enough that their hold on the wooden swords were unsteady, they practised against each other.

The winning percentage was about forty to sixty percent. Recently, Imina was in a losing streak and that had resonated within him.

"Certainly, evocation doesn't matter, that's correct."

As Imina started sulking, Shirjis smiled and nodded.

"Organic necromancy in the end, only increases the bodily abilities. No matter how much the body movement speed and reflexes increase, it's meaningless if the basic skills are uncertain. And when it comes to swordsmanship itself, between fairy tribe and human tribe... there's no inborn difference between me and Imina."

"Hmm."

Uruha still seemed dissatisfied.

With that said, there was no way she would oppose Shirjis.

"In that case, the reason Imina always loses is purely because his skill with the sword is below yours."

...instead, she has started glaring his way, in a teasing, mean manner.

What she pointed out was the truth. And, that was why it was frustrating.

"Really, Sister's so noisy."

Imina ostentatiously sighed and looked away. Feeling as if the pointed wooden sabre earlier had stung his throat, he stroked it in secret.

He looked at the sky. Cloudless, fading blue. The pasture's scent and the sunshine were pleasant, the slight moisture was reminiscent of the early summer.

He wanted to polish his skills until the Autumn and at the very least returned the winning percentage to how it used to be.

When he squinted at the sun's glare, a voice sounded from the bottom of the hill.

"Imina! Uruha, Nii-samaa!"

Ahead of where he turned to, happily rushing over and calling the three's names there was a figure.

An elf girl.

Her pointed ears,were very small and cute, reminiscent of water droplets rather than needles. Her hair was slightly bluish silver, when reflecting the sunlight it displayed complex shades like a cyan gem.

Round eyes, crystal clear lips and lovely features. But, at the same time she felt naive, holding the power to unconsciously put others at ease.

She appeared twelve by human standards. Her actual age was roughly the same as Imina's, fourteen.

Her name was Ellis. Ellis Endveil——she was Shirjis' little sister, and a childhood friend with whom Imina and Uruha played since young, the same as Shirjis.

Ellis ran quickly holding a big basket against her chest.

Her appearance, even more so than making Imina and others smile, had made them wary. That's because at times like these, ever since the old days——.

"Ah, she'll fall over."

"...don't fall."

"That's right."

The three spoke their prediction together.

"You see, I baked some bread with Aunti... kyahh!"

A stunning, **paaam**.

She fell forward, the girl's little body sprawled out on the ground.

Either she stumbled on a stone or grass, or her feet just tangled. Probably the latter. She sometimes stumbles with nothing there. It's her bad habit from the past. However, it seemed like she has accustomed herself after repeating it for years and is unlikely to be injured.

"Oww..."

This time too it was like that. She unconsciously rotated her body passively receiving the fall, she should have fallen forward and yet she ended up on her butt.

The basket she was holding against her chest was also safe.

Rather, he got impressed. It could be said she's dexterous instead.

"Geez... again, huh."

Imina stood up and walked to where Ellis was. He reached out to her as she rubbed her butt and pulled her up.

"You, you're always falling over so at least don't run."

"But, bread..."

What she held tightly with the hand that wasn't held by Imina, was a wooden basket whose contents were perfectly safe despite the flashy fall. A good scent of walnuts and wheat had come from within.

Surely, it must have been baked well.

And, she must have wanted to deliver the freshly-baked bread as soon as possible.

"Got it. Were you injured?"

"No, I'm sorry. Imina."

"You don't have to apologize."

Seeing Ellis' apologetic expression, Imina made a wry smile.

"That's right, there's no need to apologize."

Uruha interjected with a teasing tone of voice.

"In fact, Imina should have realized it beforehand and after rushing to you, he should catch you in embrace. That's why, it's Imina's fault for not being able to do that."

Imina frowned upon hearing his sister's words.

"Don't talk absurd."

"Oh my, it's obviously your duty. I mean, you, are the knight protecting the elf princess."

"Stop, that's..."

Imina was fed up with that and at wits' end.

Uruha said such things since long past.

In Imina's and Ellis' case she said "the knight protecting the princess", and on top of that, about herself and Shirjis she said "a village girl who fell for the prince", talking in such dreamy metaphors. Imina didn't like these hobbies of his sister. After all, isn't it embarrassing.

While opening the lid of the basket she received from Ellis, Uruha continued her nonsense.

"I'm not wrong. I mean, Ellis actually is a princess."

The one who shook his head towards Uruha, was Ellis' brother, Shirjis.

"It's nothing as exaggerated as a princess. Both my little sister and me."

He responded so, with a wry smile.

But Uruha still hasn't budged one bit.

"It's the same thing. In human society you two would be a prince and princess."

In fact, Uruha was the one correct.

Shirjis and Ellis——in other words, the Endveil house the siblings were born into, in the country of elves was undeniably one of the royal families.

To be precise, a "Khan Household".

The country of elves is formed by sixteen clans. The individual clans are governed by head families called "Chieftain Households", on top of that, for generations the king ruling the country is chosen through a practice of election, from among the sixteen Khan Households. The current king is, the family head of the Endveil clan. In other words, Shirjis' and Ellis' father.

However,

"The kingship isn't hereditary. When the king passes away, the elders consisting of the council and priestesses choose the next king from among the sixteen clans. The father who's from the same clan has become a king, doesn't mean that next king will be chosen from the same clan. It's very rare to choose a king from the same clan and two generations in a row."

In the mid of talking Shirjis snorted self-mockingly.

Even though he was from the royal family, it wasn't good to apply the rules of human society to it.

Before, he told them before like he did now.

Even as the child of elective king, they themselves weren't subject to any special treatment. Although they had a moderate responsibility as they were born from the Khan house, their position-wise, they could be carefree, he said. In fact, being able to play around freely would be impossible in a human country.

Against that, they themselves——each of the human siblings embraced a different impression.

The elder sister, Uruha was envious. Being of royalty was wonderful in itself, but to be able to act care freely despite that, isn't that the best, she said.

On the other hand, Imina felt sympathy. Even though you can come to play in human country, but the furthest you can go is the rural village near the border, right? That must feel really cramped, he said.

Though, they were unable to truly understand their feelings. Everything in the elven kingdom was different, also, Imina and Uruha were children from a rural village and actually hardly even knew of the lifestyle of human royalty either.

"Still, I really admire thatt."

Uruha stared intently at Shirjis. The elven prince, troubled, had returned it with a bitter smile. Meanwhile, his little sister, Ellis had stared at Imina.

"Hey, try eating the bread. How is it? I made that."

To be precise, at Imina and the bread Imina held in his hand.

It seemed like the elven princess was more concerned by the bread she baked than her social position.

"You did? Not Mom?"

"Auntie helped me out, but the one who kneaded the flour into a form and seasoned it was me, I was the one to put it into the furnace as well."

"Hee."

Since when was it, that Ellis had gotten interested in cooking——to be precise, human cuisine.

Elven cuisine seems to be extremely primitive as compared to that of humans. Although it can be said that they are using as unspoiled as possible materials that aren't processed, their staple food is nuts, meat grilled with salt and such. Of course the taste, as well as the effort is beyond comparison, but Ellis had devoted herself to human food from an early age. Whether it comes to eating or making it.

Taking in a mouthful of bread, he bit it.

The surface was fragrant, inside was moist and soft, the texture of the walnuts kneaded in was also pleasant.

Above all, *it had the usual taste*. In other words,

"The taste is practically no different from the bread Mom bakes."

Even when compared to Imina's mother, it wasn't inferior in any way.

"Really?!"

Ellis bent forward angrily.

"Umm, I was the one who kneaded the flour, prepared the form and seasoned it!"

"No, I've heard that earlier."

"Is it really same? The same as Auntie's bread?"

"Well, it's not perfectly the same but... there's not much difference."

"Really?!"

"How many times are you going to ask "really" before you're satisfied! It really, really is!"

"Yayyy!"

Talking on and on to the faltering Imina, she was in high spirits with a big smile on her face.

"Hey, you two try tasting it too! Hurry!"

Merrily, Ellis had held out the basket with bread towards Shirjis and Uruha.

As she did, her brother smiled wryly at her.

"Good grief, you finally turned towards us, *the leftovers*."

Joining Shirjis, Uruha teased her as well.

"True. For you Imina is always the number one."

"..... !!"

Ellis' cheeks were dyed in colours as vivid as the milk vetch flowers growing under her feet.

"T-that's not really true."

"Calm down a little. At this rate you'll immediately make some *blunder*."

"Oh, this is delicious. It's no inferior to Mom's, really. With this you'll be able to hold my foolish little brother's inside in reigns without a hitch. Also, Imina's favourite food is a potato soup."

"Uuu... both Nii-sama and Uruha are mean."

"Eh, ah... yes, I'm sorry."

Whether for better or worse for Ellis, the person in question, Imina was almost indifferent to her maidenly embarrassment. Maybe he hasn't matured enough yet to see her as someone of opposite sex, or possibly, wasn't aware of the of the courtesy directed towards him——but the person himself wasn't aware. However, Uruha's words "To Ellis, Imina is always number one" made him feel slightly irritated, he couldn't understand it, but he felt uncomfortable.

"S-speaking of which."

As if to gloss over the atmosphere around them, Ellis changed the topic.

"Auntie said to come back home. There's lunch."

"So it's that time already, huh."

When he looked up, the sun had already reached the zenith.

The bread she had brought was small enough to be finished with two or three bites, so rather than satisfying their appetite, it had reminded them of hunger. Surely, this size was prepared according to Imina's Mother's——Lilu's instructions. She knew well her children's minds and stomachs.

"Ah... while at it, she asked to pick some peppermint before coming. She'll use it for salad."

"Really shrewd isn't she, that Mom of ours."

Uruha smiled wryly and looked towards the back of the hill, towards the bush that was the boundary with the forest.

In that place, the peppermint had grown naturally. Since it was fertile enough and could be picked without even having to plant it in a field, the villagers didn't bother raising it and picked it from there.

"Well then, let's finish it quickly. You two boys just wait here."

Pulling Ellis' hand, Uruha headed towards the bushes.

Normally she's slightly twisted and mean, but somehow she's good at caring for others——as much as Imina didn't want to admit that.

"Ellis, want me to hold the basket? If you fall like earlier, this time you might flatten it with your butt. Both for basket and for you, it'll be terrible."

"No, it's all okay. After all, I'm holding hands with Uruha."

"Nicely said."

Getting along like sisters, they headed off.

In a distance, away from them,

"Is it fine to call us today as well?"

Shirjis asked Imina reservedly.

Among them, he was the most mature one and had always concerned himself with these things.

Feeling irritation at this politeness, with also other emotions mixed into it like envy for the politeness, Imina has frowned——this too, was the usual thing.

"What are you saying. You two are like family to us, you don't have to be reserved with your family."

The elven prince acted bashful with his beautiful features, looking as if he had come from a story.

"...I see."

"Also, in the first place, our Mom can use Ellis to help her out."

"Haha, certainly."

The beautiful silver hair scattering on the wind, pointed ears peeking out from the sides of his head, his beautiful features, white skin, slender and long limbs, being born as a noble as a bonus——everything about him was different from Imina. Without looking at him twice, he knew that well.

"We're receiving lots of help from you and it's fun too. We, Mom... and everyone at the village."

Still, Imina didn't feel any wall between him and Shirjis.

He recalled when those two siblings first came to the village.

Although they were in the village at the border, different races were still different races. There was no socializing with each other. Until then, elves were like distant neighbours, but then some elves had come out of the forest, it was two children to top it off. While the adults only looked at them from afar, the only ones who could speak to them without fear was him and Uruha.

Imina, from simple curiosity. Uruha, because of her longing for elves.

When they asked, apparently they have come to play, interested in human society. Then the siblings volunteered to take the role of guides. Homes, fields, waterwheel, the village outskirts, the small cave siblings sneaked into that was their secret base——until then there was almost no children of similar age in the village. Until then, they have mixed with groups of children five or six years older, so Imina and Uruha both were happy to play with children of similar stature. As they wandered around the village innocently, before the day was over they were

intimate with each other.

Because Imina and Uruha were like that, the villagers soon welcomed the elven visitors. Even now, everyone was familiar with them.

"It's same for us."

Shirjis quietly cast down his eyes, then turned towards Imina.

"The country of elves is boring. Boring and cramped. We're the children of Khan household, making it even more so. We're bound firmly by the traditions of the forest. ...we've come to this village seeking escape. But now, I sincerely feel glad we came here. We learned that the outside of the forest is bright, and that humans over here aren't some barbarians."

He paused there and once again looked away.

"No, I'm not happy about getting along well with humans. It's you two. It's meeting you two that is our greatest happiness, our pride."

"......o-oh stop."

Without shame, he said something embarrassing.

Just, there was dignity in Shirjis' beautiful features and movements, there was no restlessness in them. He thought that the difference in race is unfair at times like these. It's no wonder his little sister goes crazy about it. It goes so far even Imina feels it.

Realizing he was embarrassed, Shirjis raised his eyebrows.

"Well, I'm thankful for you saying we're family, but let us act refrained a little. I'm not Ellis but... the food humans make is delicious. Lilu's is particularly exceptional. If we eat too much, your share will be gone."

"You can talk, despite eating less than I do."

At the joke, Imina responded with laughter and poked Shirjis' side.

"If there's not enough, Mom will happily make more. If there's not enough ingredients, villagers will share theirs and if not, we can just hunt some. Also, Ellis recently..."

"Imina, Nii-sama! We finished picking!"

And, as if to interrupt him, the person mentioned had called out from the top of the hill.

Waving her hand happily,

"Let's hurry back! You see, I helped not only with bread, but with everything!"

"...so she says."

Coincidentally, she said the same thing Imina wanted to.

Therefore, he continued.

"Also, Ellis recently seems to be helping out with about the half of it. A guest of honour."

"Then I won't refrain."

With a gentle expression Shirjis shrugged.

"Sorry for the wait."

Two girls in trot returned back to where the two boys were.

Uruha was pulling Ellis' hand. It was a habit from old days. Concerned for Ellis as not to let her fall over——with things like this she acted properly as "an elder sister".

"Hey, what were you talking about?"

"That we're a family, and such."

But that's all Imina admired in her.

Hearing Shirjis' response, Uruha sent him a seductive glance.

"Family, huh. ...hey, Shirjis, do you prefer women who can cook as well?"

Yet again, she started saying something strange. Meanwhile, she casually pushed Ellis towards me and entwined her arm with Shirjis, acting shrewdly.

"Are that kind of women preferred in human society?"

Shirjis had a astounded expression. He didn't know well himself. Elves don't devote their effort and ingenuity into cooking, so their concept of a good wife and mother differs from that of humans.

Imina smiled,

"I haven't seen Sister help Mom out yet."

While speaking ironically of his sister, he kept an eye on Shirjis.

He put the sword in the girdle left under their feet.

"Let's have a match again after lunch. Next time I won't lose."

"Sure, got it. But it's the same for me, too."

"Oh, c'mon you're so cold. You only talk about that!"

While appeasing Uruha who puffed up her cheeks, Shirjis——the elf who was Imina's best friend——had made a smile of a young boy.

2

The Salaido village Imina and Uruha lived in was located at the eastern end of the Midgalz

Empire.

The eastern end of the Empire——in other words, it also means that it's the eastern end of the area on the continent that's dominated by the humans.

East of Salaido spreads a forest, humans are unable to live in there.

Fairy country. The elven kingdom.

Between humans, it's referred to as Elfheim. It's size is unknown. The number of its residents is also unknown. Even though there's a non-aggression treaty between the countries, there's no real diplomatic relations between them.

Fairy country exists deep in the forest, it's covered in much thicker spirit energy than the land of the humans. Although spirit energy is the source of life force that inhibits this world's universe, unlike elves with high spirit resistance, excessive amounts of it becomes poison to human bodies. Therefore, it's impossible for humans to go to the other side. Even if some curious elves occasionally come over to play, but that's the extent of exchanges with them.

Salaido is a small village.

Very, very distant from the Imperial City, there's hardly any trade or industry in it.

The life in it was monotony itself. Growing vegetables and wheat in the fields, in the forest ——of course, rather than fairy forest, meaning here the human forest——they hunt beasts, cut down trees, catch fish in the river, they live their days just repeating that.

Its population was less than three hundred people, the number of households didn't exceed fifty. All the villagers were acquainted with each other, there wasn't any conspicuous conflicts and not even travellers had come to visit because it was a remote region. Even the number of children was limited.

Such a small village was truly cramped for a vigorous boy like Imina.

——But, even though it was cramped, whether he liked it or not was a different thing.

Salaido, while it was a cramped miniature garden, it was land dear to them.

The villagers returning home from the pastures led this unchanging life ever since before Imina and Uruha were born , thus they were at peace and kind.

"Hey, Lilu's two. Also, the elven two. You look energetic today as well."

"Hello, Dolmoa."

On the way from the pastures to the houses, there's the village's only inn. It's master Dolmoa

was a stout, good middle-aged man. Dominated by his wife, Nana, today too he was drying laundry in the garden like a housewife.

"Sword practice again? Aw, that's how the boys must be."

He pointed at the wooden sword brought to Imina's waist and grinned.

"Oh no, uncle, it's not very convincing if you stretch yourself to the laundry pole as you say that."

"Haha, Uruha-chan's really harsh. Well, it's just as you say."

Despite mixing the irony in, Uruha's demeanour was quite gentle.

"What's auntie Nana doing?"

"She's cooking a meal. The stew smells good doesn't it?"

"Ah. This scent, is it a deer?"

Ellis, whose eye colour changed when it comes to cooking, had asked.

"That's right. Yesterday we caught a fine one."

Uruha teased him, but Dolmoa was an excellent hunter. Although he was like this, in the mountains he was able to catch a big boar or a deer with a single arrow——since it was rare for customers to come to the inn, he normally lives from farming and hunting.

"I'm grateful to the blessings of the fairies."

Dolmoa had winked to Shirjis and Ellis.

Possibly because this village was close to the country of elves, the things obtained in the mountains and fields were referred to as "Blessing of Fairies", a custom to thank the elves. It wasn't that they were stepping into the elves' territory. However, it was a concern to the neighbours across the border, respect for the forest dwellers.

Shirjis shook his head.

"Not at all. It's the prey Dolmoa had felled by himself."

"Nah, as compared to the magical beasts that are in the elven woods, this is nothing."

"It's all the same, whether beasts or magical beasts."

And then, from inside the house came a roar with a woman's voice.

"Lunch will be ready soon, hurry up and finish drying them!"

"Yeah, I'm almost done. ...that's how it is, sorry 'bout that. Hurry home to eat Lilu's cuisine. Well, she loses to my wife though."

"Yes yes, have a nice meal."

Uruha made fun of Dolmoa who shrewdly praised his wife, then the party had resumed walking.

With that said though, this repeated every time they met up with people.

On the footpath of the field, a woman doing farming work stopped her hand with hoe and said "getting along as usual, aren't you".

The poster girl and salesperson of the general store, who just two years earlier was playing around with Imina and others said "it's so easy to be a kid" trying to act mature, poking fun at them.

A man with a white beard who lightly held a big boar on his shoulder had said "I'll have some nice meat in the evening" as he passed by them, and laughed. He was really energetic despite reaching seventy.

A child who was playing between the fields had seen Ellis and happily ran over to her while saying "Elf nee-tan". Ellis squat down and pat his head, but as the child mercilessly pulled on her pointy ears she made a troubled expression. The mother that was working in the field stood up and screamed "hey!".

"What are you doing! Oh... I'm sorry, that was a terrible inconvenience."

"Ahaha, it's all right."

"Hey, you can't do such rude things. This onee-chan here, is an elven princess."

"Mmmggh..."

Dragged back by mother, the child still seemed like wanting to touch Ellis' ears. Surely, must have been curious about them as they were in a completely different shape from normal.

Any conversation they had with villagers was peaceful and brought smile to their faces. They were comforting exchanges. Still, despite that Imina certainly felt boredom while doing that.

But, there was a single exception.

When he met him, who lived near Imina's house——when meeting Lakshus, Imina's heart started beat faster.

"Hi, you look energetic today as well."

After recognizing Imina and others, he calmly raised his hand.

He just passed thirty years of age. His limbs covered with tough leather armour. Standing out on his gentle and narrow face, was a scar going down from the forehead to the corner of the left eye. The injury from the battle had implied of his bravery as a warrior hidden behind his meek features.

Lakshus was dispatched from the capital city to act as a border guard. His work consisted mainly of subjugating monsters that had come from the fairy country.

Under the influence of thick spirit energy the fairy country had a different ecosystem from the human country. Magical beasts and demons——dangerous creatures like Cerberi and

salamanders, ogres and goblins from time to time have occasionally wandered over to this side.

However, since Shirjis' father, the head of Endveil family had managed the area firmly such a thing happened very rarely. Therefore, while guarding the village, he's every day sent to help other houses with hunting and field work.

"Lakshus, hello!"

Still, Imina's eyes sparkled.

The leather armour Lakshus was wearing, his carefully trained body and above all——the shaking sword brought to his waist had attracted Imina's heart.

It was different from a bow used for hunting, hatchet and axes or the spears people had in their houses for self-defence.

It was a weapon for the sake of using evocation.

In other words, a magical sword.

Humans, unlike elves couldn't strengthen their bodies by pouring spirit energy into them. With low spirit resistance it had instead turned into a poison, with excessive nutrition their bodies would have become impaired.

Therefore, they have devised methodology of evocation using inorganic material in place of their bodies. They use items like magical swords and staffs to receive it and act as a medium to invoke mystics. This was called inorganic necromancy. Unlike elves who have poured life force into organic matter, it's characteristic was that it granted forces of nature like fire and ice to inorganic substances.

"Haha, you're the same as always, I don't know whether you're greeting me or this guy here."

Lakshus smiled wryly and poked the thing he had brought to his waist.

Just from the shape of the sheath one could tell it was clearly made for battle. A curved scimitar. Although he unsheathed it several times to show, but the blade made of dragon silver core and covered in blazing iron was mesmerizingly beautiful. What set the boy's mind on fire above all, was the engine prepared around the handle——the spirit charging tube and the inscribed operative unit, as well as a trigger. He also knew that inside the leather bag hanging from Lakshus' belt was packed with spirit energy tubes.

It's name was "Liminalie's Smile".

It was a magical sword he loved.

Now it was sitting in the sheath, but at time of emergency he would unsheathe it. At the same time Lakshus would take out a spirit energy tube from the leather bag, the cylindrical tubes were containing injected highly concentrated spirit energy. After entering the tube into the engine, the trigger is pulled. Then, after applying pressure to the tube the spirit energy would be poured into operative unit. The engravings dwelling inside would operate the evocation and transmit it to the blade, triggering the mystic on the sword's surface. In other words, flames, ice, acid, vibrations, sometimes even harbouring the power of destruction itself. Destroying the

enemy with a single flash——

Just dreaming of it, the longing inside Imina had stirred.

"Were you practising with sword today as well?"

"Yes."

"I'm impressed. Your skill seems like it improved as well. I can tell just by looking at you."

Happy, Lakshus smiled broadly.

"Well, don't rush it. Progress step by step. You'll become a fine swordsman. I guarantee you that."

Unable to bear it, Imina asked.

"——Like Lakshus?"

"Noope."

The words he returned were negative, but at the same time, he said something Imina didn't expect.

"Much, much better than I am... *like your father*, that is."

Unconsciously, he felt goose bumps on his back.

Every time he saw Lakshus' magical sword, he saw a scene like a dream.

Inside his head a gallant and courageous man wielded a sword. It was Lakshus, mature Imina himself and at the same time——the one whom he never met or saw, Imina's father.

His father was a soldier belonging to the royal troops.

But, he was no longer in this world.

Before Imina has become aware of the surroundings, his father died in a honourable death during the war with the southern barbarians.

Lakshus was his father's junior, it seems like he was in good care of his father, who was in charge of a troop of hundred. After Imina's father died, Lakshus wished to be assigned to this village, which was Imina's father's birthplace so that he can repay the debt.

That's why, ever since young Imina asked Lakshus about it very often.

He said, your father was a brave man. Brave and an admirable man who loved his family and the country. I don't know how many times he saved my life. I've heard very much about Lilu and you two siblings, so I don't think of you as of strangers. That's why, since that person is dead, it's my duty to protect this village in his stead.

He was proud. Proud of his father, proud of Lakshus as well.

That's why, he wanted to be the same as them.

Imina's dream. Polish his swordsmanship, go to the capital and become a splendid swordsman, a soldier of the imperial city.

And then——,

"I-Imina."

As he received Lakshus' stare feverishly, unexpectedly, from behind Ellis had grasped his sleeve tightly and pulled. She was anxious, wanting to hurry.

"Auntie is waiting. We'll be late for lunch. So, let's go already?"

"Nn? Yeah."

While puzzled by Ellis' attitude, Imina nodded.

"That's right. Hurry back."

Lakshus folded his arms and laughed. It seems like he received Ellis' words just as they were.

"We can't have Lilu's cooking go cold. It would be a waste."

"Yeah. Now then, Lakshus, see you."

"Yeah, see you later."

They lowered their heads and waved hands. Lakshus walked to the other side of the road. Surely, he was going back home for lunch.

Soon enough, Imina could see his house. The house the three of them lived in was slightly larger than average. It had the same scent as the bread Imina was chewing, as well as the scent of fried fish.

They arrived at home. Uruha opened the entrance door. While pulled by her by arm, Shirjis entered and said "sorry to bother". And when Imina was about to enter as well——Ellis who was the last,

"...hey."

Just like earlier, pulling his sleeve again she had Imina stop in tracks.

"Mm, what is it?"

He turned around.

With an even more anxious facial expression than earlier, her round eyes stared at him.

And with her voice trembling, she asked.

"Does Imina want to become a soldier, like Lakshus? To become a soldier, you need to go to a place called drill school, right? Far away from here."

"Eh."

"To become a soldier, I heard you need to be fourteen. Imina has birthday by the end of the year."

"No, that's.... right, though."

"When you're fourteen, will you go to school? And then, ever..."

A sad tone with anxiety mixed in.

And as if against it, she held his sleeve strongly.

No, he wanted to say.

Certainly, Imina wanted to become a soldier. It was his dream, his goal. For that sake, every day he worked hard at swordsmanship practice. It was true that to become a soldier he needs to leave the village and enter the drill school, he thought of doing so when he becomes fourteen.

However, Imina's dream wasn't *just* becoming a soldier.

He wanted to become a soldier and return as a border guard.

Together with Lakshus he would follow in footsteps of his father's dying wish and protect with his own hands. The village, his mother, his sister while at it, as well as the elven siblings who come to play in this village——

Because of embarrassment he couldn't say that.

That's why he shook his head, shook off Ellis hand and looked aside.

"I don't know, what's still ahead of me."

Instead, he grasped her hand and pulled.

"Ah..."

As if dragged behind him, the elf girl dove into the entrance. The boy had loudly shouted "I'm back!" to cover up his embarrassment.

Of course, because it was his future, he had to clear it out soon.

But now, the feelings of wanting his usual life were strong.

3

And then——the seasons changed, from early summer they proceeded to summer, and the mid-autumn had come.

Three more months were remaining until the Era festival of the Imperial Calendar year 1500 begins.

The daily lives in Salaido village passed calmly.

However, Imina spent every day in here while restless.

There were two reasons for that.

One, was his own future.

Imina's fourteen birthday would happen two months later, the timing of making the decision was around the corner. In other words, he had to solidify his will firmly within these two months. Whether to remain longer in the village and continue sword practice, or leave the village and volunteer to be a soldier, take the drill in the city.

And the other reason, was Shirjis and Ellis.

Those elven siblings haven't come to the village for a while already.

This kind of thing was rare. They always visited once a week, now they haven't come for two months already. Moreover, at such important time Imina's birthday was.

He wanted to do sword practice with Shirjis. He wanted to talk with Ellis. Even more so if he's going to leave the village——no, in order to decide whether he's leaving the village or not, he had to do so.

He had to win a match with Shirjis, to know whether he's strong enough to show himself in the city. He had to talk seriously about his dream with Ellis, without embarrassment and acting ambiguously. He had to settle both these matters.

Imina was impatient. While it was impossible they wouldn't come until his birthday, but if they don't come over the next two months, it won't be strange if he has to extend it for another two.

His older sister, Uruha was also dissatisfied. However, it wasn't for such a serious reason as Imina's, she simply wanted to see the face of Shirjis, whom she loved.

"Reaaally, I wonder what has transpired."

With her face on the table in living room, Uruha let out a grand sigh.

Afternoon——a suitable time for moving away from the village to do sword practice and gathering wild plants in the hills. For many years, it was common for them to spend their days together. So these days without Shirjis and Ellis coming, they were bored.

"Within two months, a maiden's hairstyle changes. For Shirjis not to come to take a look, he's the worst."

"I couldn't care less about that."

Sitting on the edge of the window with bad manners, Imina glared at his older sister.

He looked away from her and to his own palm. He recalled the feeling of Shirjis' wooden sword hitting his. Recalled Ellis weight as he pulled her up after she stumbled and fell. It's been long since he felt both of these.

Imina continued sword practice even without Shirjis. From time to time he asked Lakshus for a spar. But it was no good if it wasn't Shirjis. Even if he did practice swings alone, he lacked a rival. Against Lakshus there was too big difference in skill and he couldn't feel the tension. If it's not him——if it's not the childhood friend with whom they continuously faced each other from early age, he didn't feel himself being trained.

"You two, how long are going to rot day after day."

Their mother who had finished drying the laundry outside——Lilu had come back to the living room.

"Don't just hole yourself up in your room and go outside. Go gather some wild plants, how about you put some effort into improving today's dinner?"

"Don't wanna. If it's with Shirjis then maybe I'd feel more motivated."

"Stop using them as an excuse for lazing around."

Mother shrugged appalled.

"Then do as you please. By the way, I'm going to brew some tea with plenty of sugar now, I guess the two children who refuse to help don't want any?'

"Horrible! Also, don't try to make us help out making it!"

Uruha pursed her lips and made an exaggerated moan. Lilu glanced at her meanwhile, then snorted and disappeared in the kitchen. Both mother and daughter have really mean disposition, thought Imina. But didn't say it.

"Hey Imina, you're disappointed as well by not being able to meet Ellis, right?"

With their mother gone, the brunt of his sister's attack was aimed at Imina.

"....., I want to have sword practice with Shirjis."

"Oh, so you don't want to meet Ellis?"

I didn't say that, he wanted to object, but if he did she would probably respond with "so you want to meet her after all".

That's why he changed the topic.

"I wonder why aren't they coming."

However, he just shifted it from branches to the core.

In return, Uruha also furrowed her eyebrows anxiously.

"Yeah."

Unable to meet with the one they love, they want to see their face but they won't appear——it was different from such selfish feelings of a maiden, it was purely worry about the other party.

Neither Imina nor Uruha have worried only about their own convenience.

There must be a reason because of which Shirjis and Ellis aren't coming to Salaido village. What is it.

Aren't they burdened with something troublesome.

Maybe they caught some kind of illness.

Maybe something happened to the two——.

They couldn't go to the country of elves to ask about them. There was no means of contacting them. There was no one who could deliver a letter either, just like humans, carrier pigeon were unable to bear the dense spirit energy.

That's why Imina and Uruha could only wait.

"Geez. If there are some circumstances, they should just say so."

Uruha muttered with a sullen expression. As if to blame Shirjis who wasn't here.

"Yeah."

Imina was in tune with her.

"If they just said something, we would be able to spent time without worrying."

"Since he's a prince, he might not have anyone who could relay it for him."

"Yeah, probably."

With elbows on the table, he gave a half-hearted reply.

In the scenery he stared at, he ended up slightly expecting Shirjis and Ellis. But rather than that, the only thing that moved plants and laundry swaying on the wind.

"Oh my... this might be severe."

As the two looked melancholic, their mother had come back with tea, sighed and smiled bitterly.

But neither Imina nor Uruha felt like responding to that. More than the sweet scent of sugar and mint, the two friends who weren't here dominated their minds.

If at least these feelings reached them. Worried about the two friends, I should just pass the border where spirit energy is unstable——while thinking such helpless things, he sighed.

They didn't know if the two's feelings had reached as far as the fairy country.

But, that's something that happened five weeks later.

When Imina's birthday was imminent, to come in half a month, finally Shirjis appeared in the village.

It was a chilly night where he could feel the signs of winter.

The time was past midnight. His mother and sister were already asleep, the inside of the house was silent. Unable to even hear the howl of the wolves outside, he only heard the sound of his own breathing.

Recently, he thought about many things like his own future or about Shirjis and Ellis. Even more so before going to sleep, so he ended up going to sleep latest in the family.

With that said, the body temperature being transferred to the blanket was stronger than usual, comfort invited slumber. His body was relaxed and he could feel his thinking sink into darkness ——yeah, like this I can sleep today without thinking needless things, just when he felt that kind of relief in the corner of his head,

pam,

The sound of something hard hitting the window had pulled back Imina's consciousness.

"Nn."

He wasn't deeply in sleep, just half-asleep. What is it, he opened his eyes.

pam*, *pam. The sound repeated again for the second and third time.

It wasn't nuts falling down. He half-raised his body. His eyes accustomed to darkness, he turned his gaze to the shadow and vaguely saw silver hair floating in the darkness, as well as skin like ceramics.

"...Shirjis?"

Even in the night, there's no way he could mistake him.

Despite all, it's been three months.

The one who was there, was the one Imina wanted to meet the entire time, his close friend.

He got up from the bed in surprise. Then rushed up to the window and forcibly opened the window.

"What happened, you! Coming at night like this, no, until now..."

His loud outburst was immediately suppressed when he saw Shirjis' expression.

Shirjis was——his face whom Imina didn't see for a while, was worn out badly, very tired,

"Sorry. Got a moment?"

His voice was so tormented, Imina hesitated to let out his emotions.

"...y-yeah."

Unconsciously, his body cooled down. His heart bounced lightly.

A number of questions appeared in his head. Just what was Shirjis doing until now. Why didn't he show himself for the last three and a half months. Why did he suddenly come in the middle of night. But Imina had swallowed all of them——because Shirjis looked unusual.

He had such a desperate look, gave off such tense atmosphere.

"Got it."

About ten seconds of eye contact.

Finally Imina was able to nod. Nodding, was the only thing he could do.

"Wait a moment."

Imina turned on his heel, wore a cape that was worn on the wall and left the house while making as few sounds as possible.

As not to wake his sister and mother up, they can't learn of this. Surely, Shirjis doesn't wish for that. He had come to meet him——to meet Imina alone.

After recognizing Imina, Shirjis started to walk towards the back in silence. Come with me, he meant. That's why Imina followed him. He had suppressed the feelings and desire to ask questions about this and that.

It was almost perfect full moon. Even the middle of the night was slightly bright, when he looked below his feet he could see their shadows. As he walked quickly after the boy who led him, he wasn't delayed because of the darkness.

After leaving the house, they went down the road and after about ten minutes, they eventually arrived at the small pasture on the hill.

It was the place the two usually did their sword practice.

Shirjis stopped and turned around, then finally looked at Imina's face. Remaining silent, it felt like he prompted him. Inquire what you want to, it meant.

For just an instant, Imina squinted.

"Did something happen?"

A deep sigh——it was the first time he saw Shirjis heave such a heavy sigh——and after that, dazedly, he answered of about his own circumstances.

"*Father died.*"

"Eh..."

Hearing these words, Imina froze.

Shirjis and Ellis' father. The family head of Endveil house, the Khan of Endveil and the king of all sixteen elven clans altogether.

——The elven king died?

Imina had no idea what kind of mechanisms are moving in the society on the other side. He was only taught about the fragments of it. But, he could tell it was something very difficult.

Above all, to Shirjis and Ellis, he was a father before a king.

He had no idea what to say. Whether to comfort him, encourage him, or mourn. Imina had no idea what was Shirjis thinking. Rather than being heartbroken, Shirjis looked like he was distressing about something.

"That'...s... um... is everything all right. You know."

What he could only think of, was a vague and half-hearted question.

Shirjis closed his eyes, and,

"It was three months ago."

And slowly——as if squeezing it out, he started to talk.

"Father was the Khan of our Endveil clan, as well as the King of the Fairy Country. He was a great elf. With me as I am now, no matter how much I stretch myself I cannot even touch his back."

Surely, he was organizing his feelings. Making pauses, he slowly continued.

"But I have to inherit the post after him. I must support the clan in place of my great father. To shoulder the future of the clan... that is, the duty of the eldest son of the Endveil's khan household. No matter how immature I am, no matter how harsh the situation is, time won't wait for me. I can no longer turn back."

His fist peeking out from under the mantle was clenched tightly. It trembled strongly.

Lips were pale, yet red.

The pupils staring at Imina were rigid.

Involuntarily Imina swallowed his saliva.

What was he trying to convey. Or rather, what was he trying to spit out.

"With the king of the county's death, my home is trying to change. No, it's not trying to change... it has already changed. In the middle of it, I need to fulfil my duty and serve as the new Khan."

"...you, can it be you're becoming the new King?"

Shirjis shook his head.

"No. The new king was selected from the Lilithgrave clan. I'm merely just a Khan. However, the position and responsibilities of a Khan are... heavy. Too heavy."

"Khan, huh."

So he won't be able to afford acting like he did so far. Whether coming to the village, meeting with them, he won't be free to do so any more.

As Imina thought of that, Shirjis looked at him for just a moment with a lonely gaze.

And a moment after, he forced the edges of his lips to smile.

"...Imina."

He stuck his hand into his mantle and took out *that*, from his side.

And threw it towards Imina.

"Eh."

It rotated in the air round and round as it drew a parabola, a long rod-shaped object. When Imina reflexively received it with his hands, he realized it was a wooden sword. With a wide scraped blade, imitating one-handed sword used for duels——it was something Imina had used for daily practice.

If he wasn't wrong, it should have been leaning against the backyard like usual. Shirjis must have recovered it when he was hitting the window.

Shirjis cast a sideways glance at it and unsheathed another weapon from his waist.

Drawing a gentle curve, a single-edged wooden sword. His favourite weapon.

The elf boy had took off his cloak while holding the wooden sabre, then discarded it by his feet.

His slender limbs were revealed.

Even with the sleeves and cloth on him Imina could tell, while slender he was well-trained, he had beautiful muscles like a statue.

"...Shirjis?"

"You, wanted to become a soldier, haven't you."

And towards his friend——a human boy, he quietly said.

"A position serving human country, defending it. Same as mine. And yet, inverse. It's ironic... your birthday, my father's death. With the two aligned, the grace time for decision is gone."

While holding the wooden sabre up,

"Hey, what are you..."

Letting out signs of preparedness for coming tragedy,

"I must choose. That's why, let me decide it with this."

His tone of voice somewhat sounded as if he was seeking help, however,

"Let's have a *serious match*, Imina."

A compelling——tone of voice.

"Shir...jis?"

"I shall entrust my entire future to this match. That's why, I"ll fight wholeheartedly. I won't tell you to do the same. It's up to you how much are you going to keep up with me. But, remember. If you can't beat someone like me... you can't protect this village, this country."

"......!"

At these words, Imina's heart throbbed strongly.

It was an appeal that took form of provocation. In other words, he wanted to have a serious match.

His back tensed up.

It was more than clear enough it wasn't a trivial matter. He couldn't refuse this.

And as a bonus,

"I know, I'm having you go along with my selfishness. I'm sorry for that. But... there's no one but you, Imina. *It can only be you.*"

If he says something like that, there's no way Imina wouldn't cheer up.

"Don't apologize, Shirjis."

Imina poised his sword and lowered his body.

He didn't know the detailed circumstances. What was this match——he said it's his future, but specifically what was it——that he entrusted to it. But if he didn't responds seriously, surely Imina Haimatie will no longer be Shirjis Endveil's "best friend".

He'll lose the qualification to be one.

"I get it, I'll be go serious. Whatever happens, I'll win."

"...yeah, me too."

The air between them was filled with tension.

Tense on the verge of bursting, it was a line drawn hundreds of times during their practice, they

tensed up as if they were betting their lives on it. No——in their hearts, they did bet their lives. Even if their weapons were from iron, they wouldn't stop their swords in the verge.

"...let's go!"

The one who jumped first, was Imina.

He lowered his body, bouncing diagonally from below he raised his sword. It was an attack that would crush a thigh if it hit, but Shirjis dodged it with minimal amount of movements, taking half a step backwards.

Of course, it was already predicted he would avoid it——*including the movement used for that sake.*

Retaining the momentum after swinging the sword he turned around and released a roundhouse kick. Unable to avoid the pursuit, Shirjis received the kick with his arm.

Landing on one leg, with an unreasonable posture, this time Imina slashed from the opposite side.

The opponent defended himself with his wooden sabre.

As wood collided with wood, the five fingers on the handle bit in and vibrated slightly. It was a rare reception for Shirjis, it was Imina's response. Handling the coming attacks by parrying and dodging was Shirjis' swordsmanship. The fact that he had to stop it from the front, was the proof he couldn't do that.

Therefore, the attack continued.

Putting strength into the blade, Imina created a clash of strength——pretending that, he suddenly pulled the strength back. The opponent's posture broke. Not missing that, Imina's fist shoot out towards his left cheek.

But, that's far as Imina's dominance went.

Shirjis didn't try to forcibly rebuild his posture. Leaving his body to the flow he bent his knee, relaxing himself he lowered his sword and leaped sideways.

The fist cut through the air and he landed slightly further away.

Starting from there, it was Shirjis' turn.

Along with the signs of counter-attack, Imina felt thirst for blood sharpen like a blade.

Stepping in boldly, he thrust with a great speed.

Even as Imina avoided the first attack by moving back, subsequently the second and third came. Solar plexus, heart, shoulder, his vital points were aimed at. Even with a wooden sword, that attack wasn't something he would come out unscathed from.

The fourth one aimed at the throat. It grazed his neck, Imina endured and brushed it away

Still, the attacks didn't loosen.

The hit down blade had returned with tsubami gaeshi counter from below. Before Imina's gaze could keep up with it, this time it had slashed diagonally from the opposite side. Not his head, but his pure instinct wanted him to step back, but Shirjis moved forward to match it. Imina couldn't escape to make a distance.

From above, from the middle, from over the shoulder diagonally. Mixing thrusts in, the sharp continuous attacks came.

He avoided them in desperation, dodged and judged to receive them. When was the last time he had seen Shirjis slash so intensely. As if——his blade wore his emotions.

While numerous, each blow was heavy.

Physically, he was stronger than usual, but more than that, his spirit was conveyed through it.

It was also different from leaving the struggle to the instinct and swinging. The slashes were cold and calm, compact and brilliant, it was undeniably Shirjis' sword.

But at the core of it, was something clearly different from the practice.

Serious match, he said before they started. Exactly that. He put everything he had into every blow, attacking with his precious feelings. Surely, it was something that couldn't be communicated with words, but only with the sword.

He was the opponent receiving was it. Not Uruha nor Ellis, it was Imina.

The slashes were like a prayer.

Looking for some kind of answer——in order to come to some kind of conclusion.

That's why Imina squinted and grit his teeth.

Finding an opportunity between Shirjis' attacks, he received it and started a counter-attack.

The sound of clashes wasn't that of attack and defence, but attack and attack.

The avoidance had turned into counter-attack, his gaze had discerned opportunities through observation of the slashes and thrusts.

"UOOOOOOOOOO!!"

Shirjis roared. He looked desperately, cold sweat was sticking to his forehead.

"RAAAHHHHHhhh!!"

That's why Imina cried out as well. Also desperate, he sprinkled sweat around him.

And under the moonlight, the clashing swords have started letting out yet unheard sounds.

Again and again they have stopped. Again and again they took distance. Again and again they jumped in chase after each other. Again and again they rushed at each other. Although their blades didn't have edges, they seriously cut through the air with all their speed and strength, cutting flowers, gouging the ground, tearing each other's clothes, grazing each other's skin. Their

rough breath turned creaky, their shoulders raised up and down violently, their thin shadows didn't hold one shape, the tense atmosphere continuously bent.

Before long, Imina realized his cheeks were loose.

Regardless of the fact he clenched his teeth, a smile had spilled. It was fun. It was so fun he couldn't bear it. In the middle of the atmosphere clearly different from usual practice, while he couldn't even blink in this serious match, it's seriousness was fun. Even with a wooden sword a bone would be broken, internal organs could be damaged and at worst, one could lose a life. Still, he didn't mind. No, *that's why* it was fun.

It was uplifting because he was crossing swords with his best friend seriously, or maybe it was the struggle itself. He didn't know. He didn't know, but——as long as he surrenders to this impulse, he could hone his mind and body endlessly. He felt like he was going somewhere he never was in.

On the contrary, Shirjis' face had become more and more steep.

The match wasn't disadvantageous to him. It wasn't strange if either of them end up falling down during the competition. And yet, no——that's why, why was it. His lips were squeezed tightly.

He glared so much it looked like he had flames in his eyes, his gaze was sharp as ice. Even when dominant his movements were like that of a wounded, hostile beast. At unfavourable moments he let out thirst of blood looking like a hunter tracking his prey. His both hands held the handle of the wooden sabre with great force, with great mettle he took firm steps with both his legs on the pasture. He didn't have fun at all. If anything, he looked as if he was in pain. As if his prayer and hand reaching for enlightenment didn't reach and was on a brink of being unable to breathe, like a mountaineering ascetic.

Imina didn't notice the agony in Shirjis' expression.

Shirjis surely, didn't notice Imina made an expression of joy.

Imina wished for this fight to continue endlessly.

Shirjis probably, thought of ending it as soon as possible.

Still, the two, put everything from their toes to the ends of their hair, all their soul into this match.

How long has this fight continued. Half an hour, one hour, or maybe more.

The end would come soon.

Contrary to the difference in the expressions of the two, the match continued pure and fairly.

In other words, by their abilities.

The strength of feelings and physical ability, after they put all of it into fight for more than twelve minutes, finally a slight opening appeared——the excitement, fatigue and concentrations were at the end, and a single blow has appeared.

The appearance of the two under the moonlight was horribly contrasting.

Imina sat down on the pasture and held his powerfully hit right arm. On the other hand Shirjis looked down at him from the front, thrusting the point of his sword at Imina's throat.

Imina's wooden sword lied about two metres away, he could no longer pick it up.

The winner was standing, the loser was sitting down. The winner was holding the sword, the loser was deprived of his.

Only both of theirs breathing was rough, that was the only thing common between them.

"It's... my win."

Shirjis spoke, hoarse and feebly.

It was the first time he had declared his own victory. Normally, whether he won or lost, it was Imina who declared that. Yet today, it came from him. As if he asserted himself. To someone who isn't here——so that something, heard it.

On the other hand, Imina was unable to declare his defeat.

He bit his lips, faced down and grasped the grass on the ground disregarding his badly aching arm.

Tears gathered in his eyes. It was frustrating. Losing——that such a fun fight was over, he was frustrated that his abilities weren't sufficient.

The words Shirjis spoke before the fight had begun struck his chest right now.

——If you can't beat someone like me, you can't protect this village, this country.

He felt as if he was told he isn't strong enough to become a soldier. You are still immature, a child, that dream is disproportionate for your body.

"Thank you, Imina."

Shirjis retracted the point of his sword. Imina couldn't raise his face. It was miserable to receive thanks. He thought it would be better to be thrust at and killed off, although he knew it was just the loser acting spoiled.

Still, the elven boy spoke words of appreciation.

"I'm glad you fought against me seriously."

"I'm..."

"With this I have made my decision. I'm going to tread my own path."

There were signs of the sabre being brought to his waist. The sound of the cloak fallen to the ground being picked up. Imina still didn't move, looking downwards. Imperceptibly he started crying. From frustration, sadness, from a strange sense of loss, tears didn't stop.

"Let me say again. I'm really grateful——Imina."

The voice calling his name was more gentle than ever.

For some reason, he felt like they won't meet again.

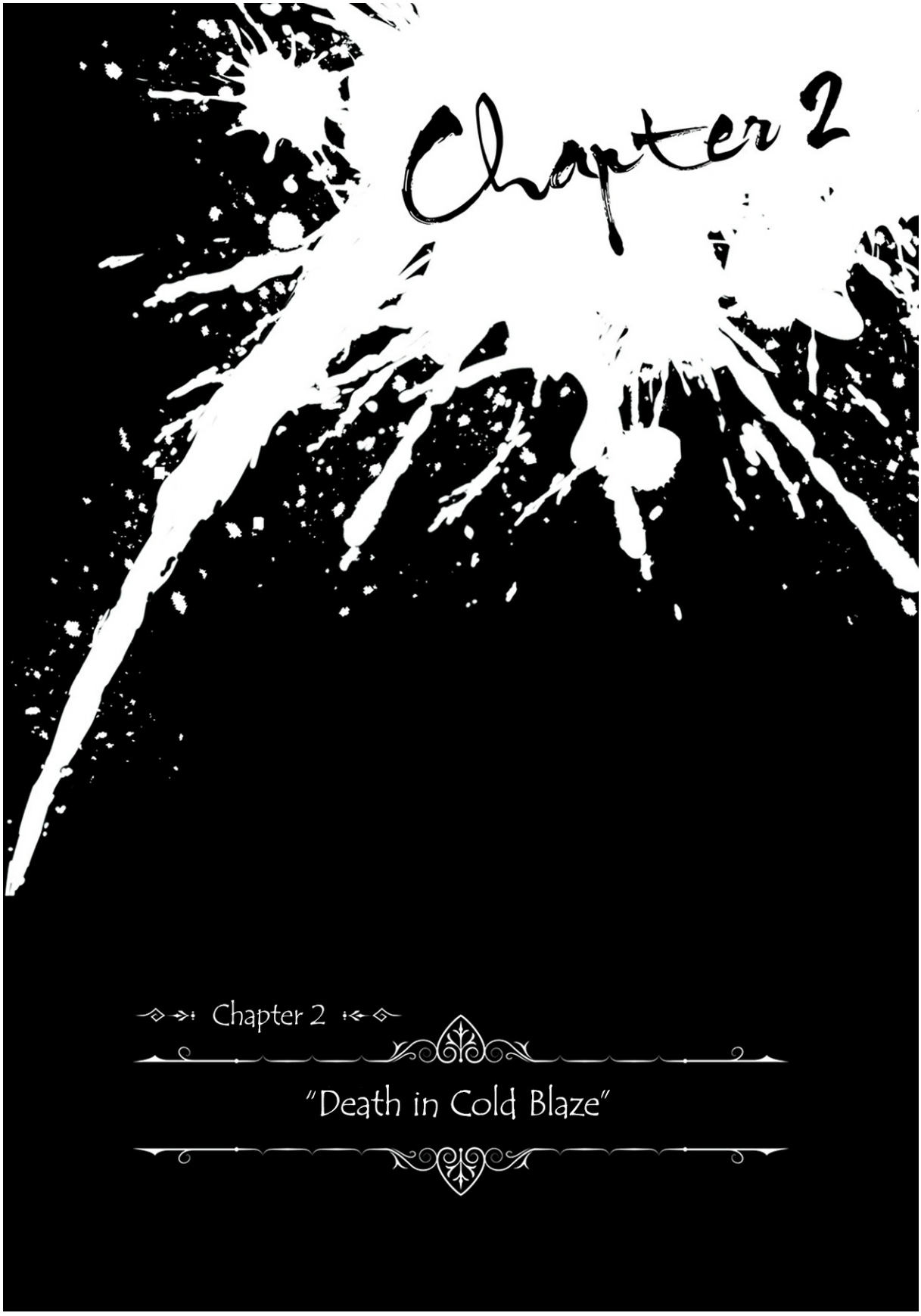
With Shirjis——his one and only, best friend.

That's why he had to raise his head. Raise his head and look at him as he leaves. He had a heap of things to ask. Just why has he challenged him to a match tonight, what was the result decided with this match. And, what is Ellis doing at the moment.

But, whether it's stopping his tears or asking, he couldn't even look at Shirjis.

The sound of footsteps has gone away.

Even though they mixed together with the sound of his sobbing, they sounded clearly.



1

One month until the Era Festival, Imina's fourteen birthday had passed just the other day.

It was already the end-of-year season.

New year's Era Festival——it starts on the dawn of the Empire calendar's year 1500. Although, apparently there's a grand variety of events and parties that are conducted throughout the year in the Imperial City, in this remote village it's just an unusually luxurious new year celebration, it had just that kind of recognition. Still festival is a festival, so the atmosphere was restless.

But there was one person who had a languishing expression in the middle of it——it was Imina.

In the end, Imina hasn't started his travel yet.

It wasn't that he gave up on his dream nor was stopped by someone. He was given permission from his mother and if he feels like it, he can start preparing as soon as tomorrow.

Still, after his birthday he reached the age at which he can officially become a soldier, but after that night——the result of the serious match with Shirjis had made Imina hesitate.

He helped out in the house and while the Era Festival preparations progressed, he just one-sidedly continued hitting a tree with his wooden sword. Lakshus told him it's already enough. If you entered the drill school as you are now, there would be no one else your age with your skill, he said. It might not have been just a compliment. But Imina was still not convinced. He was anxious as to whether he'll be able to become a person who could protect this village and the country.

——If he could at least fight Shirjis again.

What Shirjis had told him half a month had lodged itself and caused him to stagnate.

If he could win in the rematch this time, he could take a step forward.

Since then, Shirjis didn't show himself.

Not knowing any more of his situation, he could only remain not knowing what to do. It wasn't just because of Shirjis, even more so because Ellis no longer came to the village.

His sister, Uruha didn't speak of them any more either.

For a while she only spoke Shirjis' name just five times a day and was in melancholic mood only half of the usual time, recently she rarely brought up the topic. She must have either been enlightened there were some circumstances for it and must have decided to wait until they're resolved.

Still, she looked somewhat optimistic. Maybe he'll visit unexpectedly, she might have been thinking. When Shirjis came to meet Imina half a month ago——the desperate look he had and his interaction with Imina, as well as the ending of the match——it was if he, was saying farewell to this life——but she didn't know that.

——"Hey, you."

A few days earlier, he was called out to by Uruha. It was while everyone was excited about preparations for the Era Festival, Imina tried to go off alone to the forest in the east with just a wooden sword.

——"You don't have to wait for Shirjis."

She had a different from her usual, mean look. Smiling gently, his sister said so.

It's you, so you're probably thinking something like having the last match before leaving the village. But, he hasn't showed himself for a long time, if you wait you'll just waste your time. Also, I'm sure he would feel bad if you were detained because of his circumstances.

It's okay, instead of you I'll properly wait for the two. You can leave Shirjis and Ellis to me. Head quickly to the capital, get stronger and please come back. Then, as a well matched couple with Shirjis, also with Ellis who becomes even more beautiful we'll welcome you back——

The last part sounded like the usual her, but strangely he didn't feel it was unpleasant. Rather, it felt mature and somewhat dazzling. Despite all that person said, she was his elder sister and caring about her younger brother was something admirable.

However, even with his sister encouraging him, Imina couldn't take the step anyhow.

Recently, he started thinking about thinking for at least a year more. But regardless of his passive thinking, if he doesn't adhere to his schedule his resolve won't last.

That's why, until the Era Festival he single-mindedly spent every day swinging his wooden sword at the trunk of a big tree at the edge of the forest, recklessly, until he's out of breath and can't stand up——it was because when he moved his body, he didn't have to think about anything. As long as he trains his body, he can distract himself from the anxiety.

And today too, after rounding up the help around the house he headed towards the forest. Wholeheartedly he swung the sword, before he realized the day was coming to an end.

Noticing it's already evening, he stopped his sword while breathing roughly.

The coat drenched in sweat was heavy, it was cold. The season was already winter, even though the core of his body was still hot, but if he's off guard he'll freeze.

Let's leave it at this for today——when he thought so, a voice came from behind him.

"Hey, Imina, progressing ahead today as well."

It was the inn's Dolmoa.

"Good evening."

Imina lowered his head and looked at him.

He was armed with the bow for hunting he held in his hand and a quiver on his waist. Apparently he was hunting. But, it seems like he didn't catch any prey as he came back empty-handed.

Noticing his gaze, Dolmoa made a bitter smile.

"Ahh, it was no good today. I walked around quite far but I didn't get even a single rabbit."

"That's rare isn't it."

Despite how he looked, he was an excellent hunter.

"Yep, it's rare. It somehow feels strange."

Dolmoa nodded.

With that said, it wasn't because of his own skill, but because of how the forest was.

The forest was incredibly quiet. Even though it was the time for hibernation, there was no evidence of the bait in traps being touched and the nests were empty. Not even birds cried out.

"Hee."

Imina didn't notice. Of course, it was natural since he was single-mindedly swinging his sword. In the first place, the place he was in was a vacant space in the forest and nearby there's a human village. Beasts hardly show themselves there.

"Well, there are days like that."

Half-laughing, Dolmoa made a slightly disappointed shrug.

"I've been hunting recently here, so they must be wary. Maybe, they all went north? ...well, that would be unusual in its own right."

The north side of the forest was very close to the elven territory in the east.

The vegetation is also deeper, if one proceeds any further into Fairy Country, the ecosystem also immediately changes. The spirit energy on that side is dense enough to suffocate beasts, the plants are also twisted and grow abnormally, some of the species stretch their branches like tentacles and attack animals. Of course, Salamanders and Cerberi, Goblins and Ogres have their territories there so boars and deers, even bears and wolves stay away from it.

Imina swung his sword here——in a place slightly away from elf territory, on the east side of the forest. He did want to meet Shirjis and Ellis, but on the other hand it would be awkward if he encountered them coming out of the bush behind him. It's pathetic even if I say so myself, he thought.

"But, my wife's gonna get angry at me for no yield. Imina, let's go back together. If I'm with you then maybe she'll restrain herself and isn't so loud."

Dolmoa winked mischievously. It was clear that he didn't want a kid to play out late. This kind of jest was very like him.

That's why Imina made a wry smile, he wiped the sweat on his brow with his sleeve and lined up next to Dolmoa.

"Got it. But, I don't think Auntie will refrain because of me."

"Think so? ...maybe. Yesterday I caught a pheasant so I wish she forgave me."

Saying light jokes, the two had begun walking back to the village.

They proceeded on a mountain road, then exited the pastures and soon the houses entered their sight. Smoke was coming out from the chimneys of the houses. There were also people preparing for the Era Festival, but it was already dinner time.

"My stomach's empty."

Dolmoa held his bulging belly that didn't really look all that empty.

"A good scent extends this far."

"You're right."

Imina agreed with him, tried inhale the air and frowned.

"Mm? It smells like something burning."

Rather than meat being fried——it smelled like meat being burnt.

"True."

Dolmoa made a bitter smile.

"From which house is it?"

The closest one was Kashus' home. A family of an elderly couple and their young daughter. Their only daughter, Cyst would be soon in marriageable age, but from the perspective of the elders she was still a kid and they wouldn't allow it. The person herself wanted to get married to a pedlar from a neighbouring village, Wicca.

The smell of something burning had become denser as they moved closer to Kashus' home. There was no doubt it was there.

"Cyst-chan might have blundered. Or maybe Surara-san had."

Despite the laid-back tone, there was worry on his face.

It would be fine if Cyst was in, but if she was to be absent it would be just old people inside. If a fire breaks out like that, something might happen.

"...I'll go take a look. It's fine if you go back ahead, Imina."

"I'll go as well."

If something were to happen, there would be more manpower. Whether to extinguish the fire or call someone.

"That so? Thanks."

The two stood in front of the house's door.

Dolmoa knocked on the door and called out.

"Kashus-saan. It smells like burnt food, are you okay?"

It was a strong voice appropriated to his physique.

But, there was no answer.

"....., Kashus-san? Are you there? Kashuus-saan!"

Again, he called out even louder, but it still was silent——

Dolmoa frowned. His expression had become steeper. Even though the couple was old, they were far from having poor hearing and their noses were good enough to recognize the smell of something burning.

"We're opening!"

He put his hand on the door and opened it. It wasn't locked with a key. Imina stood next to Dolmoa, he braced himself to rush over to call others if the house catches fire from a pot.

Food was certainly burnt. Stir-fry meat and vegetables placed on the fire had turned black.

But, *rather than that*.

Table, chairs, fireplace, wooden walls.

It was not much different from Imina's own home, in this living room that had common in this village furniture and arrangement——there were *two corpses and a monster*.

"Eh..."

Imina was so stunned, he forgot to even breathe.

The corpses were of an old man, and, of a young woman. The man didn't have an arm, his entrails were ripped from inside is belly. His body was lying face down on the floor, displaying his bald head.

The woman's face was well visible. Or rather, just her head was lying on the table. It was Cyst. Five years older than Imina, they played together often as children. She's become beautiful ever since she found a lover, Uruha often said. But, there was no longer anything beautiful about her. Her cheeks were soiled with blood, distorted in an expression of despair and anguish, her hair disordered and stuck to her face.

His head didn't work decently, he ended up wondering where Cyst's body had gone, but found it soon enough. The monster was eating it.

Even though it was turned with its back, Imina could tell it wasn't a human. Rounded bulging shoulders, whole body thickly covered with dark, dry-tree coloured body hair, thick arms holding Cyst's body in iron grip. Above all, big mouth and fangs chewing on her breast and making a mess out of it.

In the *ecosystem of this side*, there was no such monster.

In other words, the Fairy Country's——an organism living in elven forest.

A "demon" close to primates whose feature is walking on two legs. Even among those demons ——one that has its entire body covered with hair and is of a human's size is——,

"Ugly demon... it's a Troll."

Dolmoa muttered that. He stood there like an idiot.

But it lasted just for a moment. Unlike Imina, he was a hunter who regularly entered the forest and above all, he was an adult man. He immediately regained composure and turned towards Imina,

"Run, Imina-kun."

Shortly, quietly, he spoke in compelling tone.

He raised the bow he held and quickly nocked an arrow.

"Call men. After that, go to Lakshus-kun's place. Act as a message relay."

I don't want to, let me too——he swallowed these words on the verge of saying them.

Dolmoa had predicted Imina would want to fight and immediately gave him a different role. In order to stop him from challenging the enemy, and, in order to escape.

In unusual circumstances where a demon is eating an acquaintance, having consideration and judgement——it was something Imina absolutely couldn't have calmly pulled off. Thinking he would be only a nuisance to this person, Imina obediently obeyed it.

The Troll continued his crazy meal and didn't pay any attention to them. That's why, while he had a chance.

"Got it."

He gave a short answer and turned on his heel. It was something he had to do. While Dolmoa holds this guy down Imina will call reinforcements, and in that way he'll protect the village.

Forcing his trembling legs, he started running desperately.

He knew that with Fairy Country close, this kind of thing could have happened. Still, with the reality in front of him, his confusion and consternation are really deep. There were only a few demons and magical beasts that had appeared so far and they were all exterminated so the only thing he saw were corpses.

And——in the corner of his head appeared a thought.

The reason the attacks of the demons and the magical beasts' attacks were so scarce on this remote village, was because of the good elven governance on them. They had a tight security making sure monsters don't escape to the human forests. Why was it that now, suddenly, that demons have to come to this village?

Shirjis said the king has changed. His father who was king until then died and a new elven king was crowned, so——can it be that this trouble came from his influence?

No, even if he thinks about it, it can't be helped. Even if so, what of it. It's unclear if Shirjis comes for to help, he had no grace time for waiting.

He shook his head to refocus and then concentrated on running.

First, he'll contact the next house in the village, then he'll go to Lakshus' place.

He had to hurry. Dolmoa's skill with the bow was excellent, but Imina was anxious as to whether he could win against a demon. Will an arrow pierce through that hairy body in the first place.

After arriving, breathing roughly, he carelessly hit the entrance door.

"Amary-san!"

Here——was a family of three consisting of a couple and a child. Everyone should have been in for the dinner.

"This is horrible! Next door's Kashus-san's house was attacked, by a Troll..."

Not waiting for a reply, Imina opened the door while shouting, a nasty smell has spread in his nostrils.

"......?!!"

It was an overwhelming stench.

Reflexively feeling like vomiting, he held his mouth.

He felt a deja vu. It was something he smelled a few minutes earlier. Mixed in with the smell of burnt meat in Kashus house——earlier, he was unable to process the sight in front of him, but this time he clearly understood. *It was the smell of entrails, blood and faeces.*

The husband, his wife and the children——the entire family was torn apart and scattered all over by an irregular magical beast.

It was a dog. However, it had three heads. Each head had sunk its teeth into a different body. One into husband's neck, the other into the wife's arm and one into child's torso. Size-wise, he was as big as a medium-sized dog, he was coated in fur as stiff as metal spikes, the developed muscles were like rock.

A magical beast living in the Fairy Country, Cerberus. The elf say as a guard dog it's tame like shepherd's dog, but to humans it was just a ferocious monster.

It had become aware of Imina's presence and looked back at him with one of three heads.

——No, way.

His teeth chattered. Wanting to vomit from the odour, his body felt chilly and he trembled.

It seemed like the Cerberus had recognized Imina as his new prey.

It immediately stopped feasting, the entire body including two remaining heads have turned

around and a growl rang out in its throats. It lowered its limbs and bent——kicked off the blood-covered floor, leaping in Imina's way baring its fangs out.

"A-aaa..aa."

A scream out of fear had leaked out. But,

"AAAAaa...!!"

Almost unconsciously, it had changed into a roar.

Before he realized he pulled out the wooden sword from his waist. Normally he held it with just one hand, but he gripped it with both now, braced his legs and aimed between the leaping Cerberus' heads.

"......!! RAaA!"

The Cerberus, intercepted in-mid air had whimpered like a dog and fell to the ground. Of course, the magical beast didn't have a scratch, let alone it being a fatal wound. In blink of an eye it got up and once again launched attack on Imina.

His body moved naturally. It was the fruit of every day's training.

He attracted the rushing magical beast very close, then flew to the side dodging it. At the same time as they passed by, he thrust into the Cerberus' flank. The opponent flinched and an opportunity appeared. That's why he swung from above and delivered a blow to the middle of its head, then kicked its abdomen with all his strength.

The Cerberus fell outside the house and rolled on the ground.

Imina didn't think he can stop it with a wooden sword. In a split second he entered the house, looked around inside and barred the house entrance. Seeing the acquaintances bitten apart and scattered, he cowered, tears and vomit welled up at the same time. He swallowed it all forcefully and looked for something that could be used as a weapon.

Nothing. He couldn't find anything. There was nothing but the corpses. The three from the Amary house died without any resistance.

Maybe he should go outside. There should be a plow and a sickle in the barn.

bang, an impact hit the floor. The magical beast tackled it. It was a matter of time until it's broken. There was no choice but to escape through some window and into the barn.

He resolved himself, and when he tried to head to the room in the back.

Outside, something like a hand whistle——a shrill sound like that had rang out.

The whistle lasted for approximately five seconds, after a short breath, there was another one which also lasted for five seconds. It happened three times in a row. He didn't mishear, it was clearly artificial.

Imina furrowed his eyebrows.

When the whistle had sounded, the magical beast stopped tackling the door. The surroundings were wrapped in silence. Imina tried to listen in to any signs of it, but he could no longer hear Cerberus' breathing.

——What does this mean?

Maybe it was a sign of warning from one of the villagers and hearing it, the magical beast changed its target. No, even though irregular it was still just a beast. It was hard to think it would give up on the prey it had set its sights on. If there was one thing to think of——could it possibly be.

A shepherd dog would immediately rush to its master after hearing him whistling.

And, elves tamed magical beasts as if they were dogs or cats.

"Shirjis...?"

Did he come? Possibly he came and is acting to appease the magical beasts and demons.

Imina's eyes sparkled. Suddenly a hope sprung inside him. In that case, I can't barricade myself in here, I need to go and help him out, he thought.

He rushed to the door, removed the bar from the door in a hurry.

But——the light of hope in Imina's chest,

"Eh..."

Was repainted dark by the inferno beyond it.

He jumped out of the Amary house and had a full view on the village.

Gently rippled, open hills, familiar houses.

More than half of it, *was engulfed in flames*.

"Can't, be."

Illuminated by sunset and flames, villagers ran away trying to escape. Chasing and catching them and ripping them apart were magical beasts and demons.

When he moved his gaze stunned, he saw the Kashus' house.

His sight finally focused and he saw something like a darkened piece of meat lying at the doorstep.

It was Dolmoa's corpse, who had his neck turned in strange direction.

Unable to withstand it, Imina vomited on spot.

The hell had already unfolded long ago.

2

Here and there in the village, there were flames, blood, mud, screams, destruction and bodies in a messy clutter.

It was gruesome, that was the only word it could be described.

As he moved towards the centre, the number of dead bodies lying on the roadside increased. Of course, all of these masses of meat used to be his acquaintances, every time Imina looked his breathing was disturbed. As he avoided the wandering demons and magical beasts, corpses entered his sight regardless of whether he wanted it or not.

The inn——the arms loosely hanging from the window were that of Dolmoa's wife, Nana. But, there was no head between her arms.

There was a woman who had her clothes torn off and died in that state. One exposed breast was gouged, between her loosely opened legs there was blood. It was obvious what has been done before she was killed, Imina's empty stomach had begun to once again act up.

The daughter of the general store owners was bitten apart by a magical beast. The store front that had items for sale displayed had collapsed, mixed in with it he could see five pieces of her body. When Imina was very young, whenever he fell over she would pull him up by hand and they would run around the fields together. In recent years she put on mature airs, but she still had a gentle look in her eyes——together the daily goods, tableware, wooden tools and her entrails had become a mountain of junk.

There was also a corpse of a man who fought bravely. By the roadside, around him there were several magical beasts he exterminated. But, with a machete for self-defence he was unable to win against a demon. His body's upper and lower body were torn apart.

Of course, it wasn't just the corpses that attracted Imina's gaze.

Even now, there were people dying in the village.

In a certain house's garden, a woman had her abdomen eaten while alive. The one eating her was a small demon——a Goblin. The monster had an eerie blue skin. It had filled the breast of a woman sitting in the corner of the garden with its face and was feasting upon her internal organs.

Of course, she was an acquaintance.

It was a mother of a child really attached to Ellis——her name was Samaji.

His eyes met with hers, Imina let out a soundless roar. Whether from anger or sadness or despair he reflexively swung his wooden sword, tried to jump and beat up the Goblin. However, Samaji made a light smile and shook her head, she stopped Imina with her trembling right hand.

You can't come——she meant.

She had a gentle and calm look in her eyes.

The eyes she had shown when her son played with Ellis, a mother's eyes.

After stopping Imina, using both her arms, Samaji hugged and held down the Goblin that continued eating her belly. And she moved her lips. Escape. You, escape.

Her bitten lips overflowed with blood. She clenched her fist so hard it turned white. Even though her head was full of the sound of her heart beating, Samaji smiled and nodded next.

That's right. Rather than her, who was beyond salvation already, Imina should give priority to people more important to him. This person had pushed his back. Bearing the fear and pain, but still.

"I'm sorry."

Unable to bear it, he let out a voice. Even though the Goblin might notice it, even though the demons and magical beasts nearby can notice it. But he couldn't go without saying it.

"I'm sorry... Samaji-san. I'm sorry."

Repeating the words that couldn't count as atonement, Imina turned away.

His home was already a stone's throw away——the home ahead of his sight wasn't yet broken apart in a flashy way nor burning. The face of his mother and sister floated in his mind, they have overlapped with the corpses he saw until now, then further overlapped with Samaji's dying smile and he felt like he was going crazy.

That's why he desperately moved his tangling feet and ran.

He ran, ran desperately, he put a hand on the door of the nostalgic and familiar home.

It didn't move. It was barred from inside. He panicked for just a moment, but soon noticed. Since it doesn't open——it must be closed from the inside.

"Mom! Uruha!! It's me!"

"Imina?!"

It meant that inside, *living humans have barricaded themselves in.*

A muffled reply had come from inside the house. Along with a rattling sound the bar had come off.

The face that had appeared to welcome him was that of his sister's, she hugged him putting her face as close to him as possible.

"Hurry up and enter!!"

What he heard from the side was undeniably his mother's voice. At the same time he was dragged inside by his sister and immediately closer the door. Next, he was embraced by Lilu from behind.

"Good, you're.. alive...!"

"Stupid, this idiot! You're alive... Imina... I'm so gladd..."

His mother overflowed with tears, his sister also had a tearful voice. Imina too, flooded with tears in relief.

"Sorry. But, it's great that Mom and Uruha are both safe."

"I was attacked once."

After regaining composure his mother let go of him and responded while wiping tears.

"When I went outside to pick up firewood... it was a big lizard. But, Lakshus-kun saved me."

"Lakshus has..."

"That's right. That person, when he realized there was a commotion he came here straight away, first."

"So, he's fighting."

Hearing that name, he was reassured.

He was a remote region's guard dispatched from the Imperial City, the only person in this village who had a magical sword. In other words, he could fight with magical beasts and demons as someone more than equal to them.

The magical sword could clad itself in flames, overflows with ice, emit acid and vibrate. The power of those mystics, coupled with swordsmanship should be able to easily destroy the hard fur and muscles of the monsters. That's why surely, at the moment he must be slaughtering them somewhere in the village. There's lots of monsters so it might take time, but soon enough this tragedy will end.

Beside Imina who tried to inspire his broken heart, Uruha muttered quietly.

"...still, why something like this happens."

"In the village's history, something like this never happened."

His mother bit her lips and wondered.

"So that demons and magical beasts don't come here, elves are keeping firm watch. Even in the forest it's rare to see footprints of demons and magical beasts."

That's why Salaido village was able to exist peacefully by the border of the Fairy Country, which could be called an alien world. They were unaffected by the thick spirit energy when they went to hunt in the forest and weren't raided by magical beasts and demons as they lived in the village.

And yet, why.

That story told Imina by Shirjis half a month earlier had appeared in his mind again.

The death of his father and change of the elven king. Since it's come to this, he could only

consider it related. The border's defence must have gotten loose because of the turmoil.

"Uruha, Mom, it's all right."

With confidence, Imina showed the two a smile.

No matter in how much disorder the Fairy Country was, there's no way Shirjis will remain silent as Imina and others are attacked. Before long he'll rush over to help.

No, surely, he's already rushing over.

After all, earlier in Amary's house he saved Imina's life, hasn't he.

The Cerberus disappeared somewhere after hearing an elf's whistling. They had techniques that made demons and magical beasts obey them. In that case, this situation might be already calming down. The proof of that, was that the outside was awfully quiet. There was no signs of monsters coming to this house——.

Suddenly.

Along with a loud voice, the house's door was forcefully destroyed.

The three were wrapped in astonishment not allowing them to even scream reflexively. They had an illusion of their hearts stopping. Imina, Uruha and Lilu hardened like a stone.

Entering through the broken, barred door was a huge body.

Its height was more than two and a half metres, it wasn't just its height, it was wide as well.

Large muscles on its entire body. Black skin like a rock. Sharply slanted eyes and ears, a mouth like a crack with fangs peeking out. Although it had few hair, it was covered in spiked mane from the head to its back.

Wicked demon——called Ogre, it was the most ferocious species among all demons.

For powerless humans, it was despair incarnate.

"Hii."

Uruha let out a soundless voice.

"......!!"

Probably from mother's instinct, Lilu covered her children with her arms as if to protect them.

However, beside Uruha, flinching, before Lilu could embrace him——Imina's gaze wasn't turned towards the intimidating monster, it was nailed to a different place.

The Ogre's arm.

As large as a log, there was something held by its five fingers.

Not fitting the black body, a *palely shining scimitar.*

By the handle, it had an exaggerated apparatus. Having a spirit energy tube for charging, a device with evocation engraved and trigger, it was the engine of the magical sword.

Imina knew it well.

With blazing iron used as a blade and core of the dragon silver, it was called "Liminalie's Smile". Previously, he heard all about it. Inscribed on it was the name of a sister who died at early age,

"Lakshu...s's."

Imina's father's junior whom Imina always admired, the thing he always had by his waist——,

"It can't... be."

Why.

Why does this Ogre hold Lakshus' sword?

Was Lakshus defeated? By this guy? Lost, killed, then deprived of the sword?

——And,

"...aa."

When he looked up at the Ogre, Imina was shocked.

Ears distorted in atrocious shape, fangs peeking from the mouth gaping up to the earlobes, slanted eyes.

Left eye.

Running diagonally from the forehead, was an old *sword wound*.

It was very similar to that on Lakshus' face——no, it was the *exactly same wound* as his.

The corner of his head was awfully cold, suddenly he was reminded the events from several minutes ago like a revolving lantern. And as if a by-product of it.

Lines connected.

No——*ended up connecting.*

First, the Kashus' family house he saw first. It was a three-person family, and yet there were two corpses being eaten by a Troll. There was Cyst, the daughter and the father. Then, *where was the mother?*

Amary family was wiped out. However, strangely, the Cerberus eating them was inside the house despite the door being closed as if it *was in the house in the first place.* Yeah, that's right. That house had a dog. A shepherd dog called George.

General store. Although there was the daughter was dead there, it was too late for her to remain alone. The original owner, her father should have been home. He wouldn't remain silent as his

daughter is killed. But, he wasn't there. *There was no corpse.*

Even as Samaji-san was being eaten by the Goblin, with gentle eyes she shook her head to Imina. The Goblin——had a small body like that of a human's child, it devoured her belly *while it was hugged like a child.*

Elves, unlike humans poured spirit energy into their living bodies rather than inanimate objects and strengthened them. It was so-called organic necromancy. Their muscle strength and vision, as well as reflexes were enhanced many times.

But, if by chance organic necromancy was used on something other than their own bodies.

In the past, he recalled learning something like that from textbook. Fairy Country's ecosystem was different from human world's, the plants and animals are influenced by dense spirit energy and become irregular.

Then, on the contrary.

If the animals and plants of the Fairy Country had grown influenced by the dense spirit energy ——then in the first place the animals and plants of the human country and Fairy Country were originally exactly same species.

If animals and plants of this side are exposed to the dense spirit energy, it was possible.

In other words, magical beasts. If they were altered by organic necromancy, originally beasts.

In other words, demons. If they are were altered by organic necromancy——.

"Hu...man?"

It wasn't that the Ogre took Lakshus' magical sword.

It held the sword from the very beginning.

"It can't be. It can't... impossible."

At the same time Imina muttered, the Ogre moved.

Without reserve it took a step forward and reached. Towards the mother protecting her children, Imina and Uruha with her back——towards Lilu.

"Ah..."

"Mom?!"

The family embrace was simply pulled apart by the monster's brute force.

It was a sudden and irrational, eternal separation.

Carelessly grasped head. Lilu was unceremoniously raised into the air with one hand. As their mother flapped her legs struggling in front of them, neither Imina nor Uruha could let out a single word.

"....., ...kh..... ....mm.....!"

Lilu's muffled scream coming out from the Ogre's hands didn't feel real. However, what they heard, was their mother's last voice.

**gslhsh*——*

Along with a dull sound, there was sound of something breaking.

"Eh...?"

Both of the rampaging legs and hands, painfully trying to scratch the Ogre have started hanging loosely. The scent of blood tickled their noses. The scent of mother's——blood, overflowing from the skull.

Her body was crudely discarded in the corner of the house.

"Mo...m...?"

There was no answer to the call. Their mother didn't even budge. The scent of blood was getting denser.

Impossible, they thought.

It happened too fast. This can't be.

After all, she was just held by head by the monster, lifted up and only a little bit of strength was put into the grip. And yet, with just that, *with just that.*

A vigorous woman who all alone raised the siblings, their mother has.

Slightly nagging yet gentle mother has.

As Imina said he wants to become a soldier, slightly lonely, but even more happily she said "you're your dad's child after all", that mother has.

There's no way——that mother has died so simply.

The Ogre didn't even glance at their mother.

He looked at Imina and Uruha. The gaze went back and forth between the two. There no longer was anyone who could protect the two.

The gaze *stopped at Uruha.*

"Aa...hii."

Once again the giant hand outstretched, its five fingers were wet with Lilu's blood.

The elder sister was held. This time by the right arm. Without the regard to the fact an overwhelming grip broke the arm like a twig, ignoring the scream of agony, he raised her up and in front of his face.

The magic sword held in its other hand——the blade protecting this village——was already discarded.

Then at Uruha's chest, he grasped her collar and tore it apart like paper.

"...hii."

A long tongue had extended from crescent moon-shaped mouth and licked Imina's sister lips.

He lowered her half-naked body onto the ground and pinned her down face to the ground,

"N...o..."

The Ogre covered her from above.

What was he trying to do, both Uruha and Imina understood.

"N...O. NO. NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!!"

A scream had come out of Uruha's mouth as if she was on fire.

"NO, NO NO NO NO NO NO NO. THAT'S, NO I DON'T WANT THATTT!"

On top of her, the Ogre growled loudly.

"NO, NO, LET GO, STOP, LET GO OF ME... LET GO LET GO LET GOOOOOOOOOO!"

With this scene in front of him, Imina's face and lips turned pale.

His mother was killed and a cruel thing was being done to his sister.

The monster who caused this tragedy——of all things, was a prideful warrior whom he admired and made his goal.

Why would he do such a thing? Why would it turn like this?

Lakshus. He was a soldier serving the country, former subordinate of late father. He came to this village to repay Imina's father's for care, a person who became a guard of this village. Such a person laid a hand on the person whom he owed and on top of that, tried to rape his daughter. Such a thing——such a horrible thing, is it really all right.

There was no way.

Imina stood up.

His legs trembled. But he still moved. If he could move, he could do it.

Hurry. At least before something irreparable happens to his sister, hurry——

He ran. Towards the magical sword discarded by the Ogre earlier.

Picked it up, held the handle. It felt much heavier than the wooden sword he was wielding every day, maybe because of the difference between one-handed sword and scimitar, or maybe

the difference between a wooden and a normal sword, or maybe because of the reality in front of him.

He didn't know at first glance whether a spirit energy tube was inserted. Imina didn't have any experience with using a magical sword. But it didn't matter. In any case, there was no choice but to do it.

Imina put strength into his limbs, held the scimitar and squeezed the grip on both the handle and trigger,

"UOOOOOOOO!!"

From over the Ogre's head, he strongly swung it down.

The magical sword spat out blue flame. As to wrap the blade, the evocation had activated.

The scimitar clad in flames had hit the shoulder in a blow using the entire body.

Ogre was unfazed. The blade hardly went through. The heat just slightly burned its skin. And an arm, as if to swat a fly had hit Imina from the flank.

An impact that felt like it abolished his sense of balance, gravity, and vision.

His body was blown away. It destroyed the house's wall with which he collided and he had rolled outside.

"Ka... ha. Aa!"

He couldn't breathe. And yet, something hot was overflowing from the back of his throat. A sticky liquid——it was blood. He felt like he would faint if he loosened his concentration for a moment. He didn't feel pain in the abdomen that was hit. Instead, the texture of the soil he stroked with his cheek was awfully clear.

Imina grit his teeth and stood up. Using the magical sword he miraculously hold onto instead of a stick, he put all available strength into his legs.

The Ogre's giant body had emerged from the hole in the wall. It's eyes were even more slanted then before and it had bared its tusks like a tiger. It was a fierce look. Apparently it was angry at Imina for interfering.

However, even if he had turned his rage towards Imina, Uruha wasn't released——the Ogre walked over to him with her body under his arm. Still, even though he was unable to retake her, he stopped the act before it was stuck in, which was his single relief in despair.

Struggling violently, Uruha raised her face. Ahead of her line of sight was Imina.

"Imina... Imina!!"

Feelings of worry for her brother and feelings of wanting to be saved. He could tell those two were conflicting inside of her. She wouldn't be able to bear Imina dying. But on the other hand she was too afraid of being raped so she couldn't scream for him to run away. That's the expression she made.

The heartbreak felt like bursting his chest apart. Enough to make him forget about severe pain running through his body.

"Damn...!!"

Frenzy and impatience dyed his vision red.

I need to stop him. No matter what happens, losing isn't allowed. If I lose——Nee-san will die. She'll be killed by Lakshus.

"Kghh...aa, oooOOOOOO!"

He inspired himself with a cry and raising the sword again, he took the first step.

It was——then.

**ka* *ka* *ka*, *ka*.*

Four arrows hit the Ogre's head. In quick succession.

"Eh."

It was too sudden. To Imina's eyes, it looked more like the arrow grew on his head. It was the same for the Ogre——a few seconds later, as if the monster realized he was killed, it collapsed forward.

The Ogre also threw away the body of Imina's sister, which rolled on the ground.

"Nghh...!!"

Uruha held her hit head and raised half of her body.

On the other hand, Imina stood stunned.

Unable to run up to his sister, he looked towards the direction the arrows came from. The moment he reflexively turned his face, his consciousness was nailed to it.

It was *them.*

There——were seven figures.

They weren't humans from the village. No, *they weren't humans.*

Shining in the setting sun, incredibly white skin.

Despite the individual differences each of them looked graceful.

Above all, two ears pointed like needles——.

They were elves.

"Tch, whatt. Why did you kill him, he was at the good part."

Next to the house, a boy leaning on tattered broken wall-board said that with a light smile. His childish features and low stature were reminiscent of an innocent, mischievous girl.

"At least wait, until this kid's crushed by the Ogre."

However——what he said was nothing as gentle as "mischief".

"Why did you save them? It can't be that you're having mercy on mere humans, Emeane."

The one who spat that out with irony, was a slim youth standing next to her. He had a pair of eyes that suggested a bad personality, they were coloured with mix of arrogance and nervousness.

The youth demonstrated his opinion not just with words, but also showed it with actions. In other words, he trampled and rolled a head that was lying on the ground.

Imina gasped. Yeah——what a thing. That was the head of the neighbour, Roffen-san.

"You had no reason to get in his way. Did you have a change of heart?"

"...as a woman, I didn't feel like watching it."

The response came from above, from a woman with a knee on top of the roof. Her hair was cut shortly in a cool manner, it was a cold, ice beauty. There was shuddering charm in her long and slanted lips.

She was holding a bow in her hand. Apparently, she was the one who saved Uruha. Of course, the fact she saved them didn't mean she was an ally.

"That's the only reason. Or maybe, you have any objections to what I did?"

"...hmph."

At the woman's words, the slim man clicked his tongue in response.

"Kukuku, really? I had fun too, you know?"

"Me too me too. I love these kind of things... so vulgar. Kukuku."

As if to pour water on the two's quarrel——behind the woman, two girls stood side by side on the building's large wing and laughed darkly. The two looked like peas in a pod, perhaps they were twins. Although they were beautiful like a lotus flower blooming in the grassland appearance-wise, in their eyes dwelled a dense and dark colour and like mud, the gloom from their eyes made the lotus rot.

"Isn't mating of the livestock interesting?"

"Hey, the ugly scene... isn't it laughable?"

The words they let out were disturbing and cruel. Contrasting with the woman in front.

"I don't mind. Whatever the motivation, Emeane's actions were correct."

A middle-aged man leaning with his back against the pillar spoke in a well-resounding voice.

He looked the oldest among the bunch. He was wearing an eye-patch due to a battle injury. His features were tough and dauntless, his stout poise and attitude were natural to a warrior.

"A demon that doesn't listen to given commands and acts selfishly isn't suited for taming. Disposing of it was appropriate. ...however, it's hard to use those made from corpse seeds, they lack obedience."

"Ha! Leaving it to demons makes it pain in the ass. We should have done it ourselves from the start. If needed I could even do it myself."

A large man spat that out in loud voice and sat down on the ground. His large and tough body was more like that of an Ogre than elf, there was a different harshness coming out from his body than that of the man with the eye-patch. The battle axe he pierced beside him was huge, the blade was like a tiger's head.

"There ain't competition. Humans are always this weak. Actually, that warrior looked quite good but... you went and made him an Ogre, geez."

Unreserved and irreverent tone of voice, intimidating demeanour and look, condescending attitude making fools out of everyone but himself. A man who was a mix of of gracefulness and ferociousness.

"One way or the other, you love *bullying weak things* don't you, Vorguno."

The little boy elf started ridiculing him.

"Ah? What, you picking a fight with me, Cissha? Or maybe want to be bullied by me? Certainly, I might like it, bullying weak. To me you're weak as well, you know."

"Hee, want to try?"

The boy called Cissha laughed fearlessly, with enigmatic attitude he released thirst for blood.

"Oh, want to go at it? I said it earlier, I ain't have rampaged enough."

The man called Vorguno leaned on one leg and made a smile like a beast.

The one who restrained the two was the man in the eye-patch.

"Do it if you want. However... when you make cheap quarrels, remember this. The valour is the vessel. The vessel of the one who swings valour over cheap things is also cheap. To us, Endveils, these people aren't necessary. I won't overlook it just because you're young."

"Cissha, Vorguno, how about I'll become your opponent first."

On the roof, the tall woman——Emeane put away the bow and put her hand on the dagger at her waist.

"We, the 'Six Petals' are supposed to be Lord Khan's shield. Our valour is Lord Khan's valour, our vessels are Lord Khan's vessels. If you sell it cheap, I will not forgive you."

"Hmph, geez, you're really crazed about Lord Khan."

As Emeane gave him a sideways look, the slim man nervously ridiculed her.

"Then, what was that earlier? Releasing arrows to save a human woman, that's what makes your valour cheap doesn't it."

"Kukuku... hihaha! Kuzan's being jealous again."

"Really, true. After all, Emeane won't even look at him."

The twins in sync teased the slim man.

"Silence, Nokt, Mikt. Your voices hurt my ears."

The thin man——Kuzan had narrowed his pair of eyes and spat out.

"Should I bite off your tongues? Or maybe fuck you until you can no longer let them out?"

"Oh dear, your "Single Skill"... are you going to show it to us?"

"Kukuku... that sounds interesting."

Unique Vocation, an unfamiliar word entered Imina's ear.

However, Kuzan frowned and his lips distorted cruelly.

"Hmph. I don't hesitate to show my 'Valour'——Unique Vocation, but someone like you can't make me move a single finger. In other words, it's enough to show it on a Cerberus or an Orc."

"Oh my oh my, how wonderful. I wonder how a dog's drool tastes. Right, Mikt?"

"You're right, Nokt. I wonder how does a demon's drops splatter? Ufu... kukuku."

With grim presence, the twins returned a dirty provocation.

"Hmph, you insane twins."

Letting that out with irritation, Kuzan's leg moved. The head rolling on the ground——Roffen's head was kicked towards the girls.

Half of the twins easily caught it flying straight at them,

"He looks like he'd make a good Orc but, unfortunately. With just a head you can't plant a *seed*."

Disinterested she threw it behind her.

As they had their exchange, Imina stood there unable to move.

Their conversation entered his ears, his lips trembled and fingers stiffened.

Seven elves.

For better or worse, all of their presences were dangerous. The content of their exchange all made him disturbed.

There was something he couldn't overlook in their conduct. There was something he couldn't overlook in what they were saying. Thinking it over one by one, the more he organized it in his head, the more it screamed it's no good. There was another him, *stopping him* from thinking.

If he organizes the thoughts, he'll naturally come to a conclusion. Simple and only conclusion. But——*that's why,* he couldn't.

He shouldn't arrive at it.

That's because——

"Youngsters, close your mouths already."

While sitting down, Ji-dig turned his only eye behind Imina's back.

"Lord Khan is present."

Lord Khan.

Imina turned around. He couldn't stop himself from turning around. It was as if his stiff body that couldn't move earlier was pulled by a string.

Elves all at once have turned serious.

Ahead of his line of sight there were collapsed house. That of Roffen's whose head was discarded earlier. On the road extending from it and leading to the central square came a figure, walking.

The figure had stopped behind Uruha who was sitting half-naked and covering her breasts with an arm.

After that for a few seconds——Imina's time had passed incredibly slow.

He thought of not wanting Uruha to turn around.

If she turns around, she'll see. *That guy's* face, his appearance, she'll see it. Seeing it would be her greatest hope, that's why it's her worst despair.

But on the other hand, he thought, turn around.

If you don't turn back, you can't respond. You won't be able to avoid the waiting despair.

That's why I need to move, he thought.

Move, run, so that she can avoid despair of turning around——he just needs to save her. The one and only dear, elder sister of Imina's.

Uruha was always an annoying existence. Mean, loved to talk about love affairs Imina hated, for some reason tying those to him and poke fun at others. It was so annoying he couldn't bear it. However, on the other hand——he knew that she had discreetly cared about him and Ellis. That's surely the reason she was loved by the villagers despite her gossipy personality.

Now that her mother had died, the only remaining family was the only one who could save her.

But.

His consciousness moved much faster than the flow of time and yet, his body wouldn't keep up. He wanted to rush over but his legs wouldn't break into a run. He wanted swing his arm up but his arm wouldn't respond. He wanted his fingers to strongly grip the sword, yet no strength would enter them. At least his voice. Just one word is fine. Stop. He wanted to shout as loudly as possible. Yet, yeah, yet——his throat wouldn't even tremble.

Just his gaze, captured *that guy*.

The one standing behind Uruha, *that guy*.

He held a sword. A single edged, curved long and thin one-handed blade. It was in almost the same shape as the wooden sabre used for practice. On the other hand, unlike the wooden sabre, the long sword shone in silvery white colour.

Fitting the blade well beautiful silver hair, like a flowing river.

His features were so refined one could take him for a woman, tough yet fascinating.

His limbs were supple yet strong, reminiscent of a deer lightly rushing through the hills and fields.

Imina knew him well.

Ever since childhood, they were together on a daily basis, so he knew him well.

It was *that guy*.

That guy, who for Imina and Uruha was practically family——ahh, what a thing.

The elves behind Imina gathered nervously and respectfully.

These lined-up elves have seen humans as lower organisms. It was an arrogant and disturbing attitude. But the words he heard from their mouths——"Lord Khan" and "Endveil clan". There was undeniably respect in them.

The "Lord Khan" who appeared, looked just like someone both Imina and Uruha knew.

He unsheathed his long sword.

With a cold expression devoid of emotions, he glanced at Imina, then looked down at Uruha.

Imina's lips finally moved. He tried to shout. His vocal cords finally began to react. But.

But.

Maybe guessing from Imina's seriousness or maybe she felt a presence behind her, Uruha looked up blankly. Her eyes were red as she was flooded with tears on the edge of despair earlier. She had swollen eyelids. Cheeks wet with tears. Her lips deep blue. Not befitting her, who always paid attention to her appearance, an undignified face.

That was the end.

From behind, Shirjis Endveil had thrust his long sword and pierced through Uruha's heart.

3

Imina's body caught up to his consciousness only when Shirjis pulled out the sword and his sister's body had finally lost its strength.

Too late to do anything, so the first thing Imina did was to scream.

"U, aa, aAA, AAAAAAAAAAAAAA!!"

Having a hard time with his legs tangling, he ran. He arrived by his sister who was already finishing her fall.

He discarded the sword and embraced her upper body with both arms. It was still warm. Still, warm. But the warmth was a residue rather than her body temperature. From here on, she'll only quickly lose it. Her heart was no longer beating. There was no pulse. No breathing There was no proof of living. Her eyes half-closed, nothing reflected in her pupils.

Where did her soul go? It must still be floating nearby. If it's pushed back into her mouth before it diffuses in earth's spirit pulse, won't she open her eyes? With elven evocation that much is possible. Then, why won't Shirjis do so? Why, is he looking down at us in silence? Why? Why ——.

"Wh ...y."

Embracing his sister's body, wiping away blood from her clamped lips, with his vision stained redder than blood, Imina looked up at his best friend.

The man whom, until last night he thought of as of best friend——he looked up at him.

"Shirjis, why. Why...!"

"Lord Khan."

A man's voice had come from behind.

"The disposal of the village is mostly complete. The only one remaining is this boy."

"Well done, Ji-dig. Also, 'Six Petals'."

Shirjis ignored Imina's question and returned a nod elsewhere.

"You have my thanks. We, the Endveil clan had the first strike."

All seven at once have corrected their posture at once. Pointing their elbows to the ground, horizontally they hit their chest with their left fists. It was a salute of elves. In other words, they were undeniably Shirjis' subordinates.

And——the perpetrators behind the tragedy in this village.

Ji-dig spoke in stern and grim voice.

"Lord Khan... no, Shirjis, we're ones who ought to say thanks. We were saved thanks to you. You had to make a painful decision."

"Uncle Dig, let's not say such things."

Shirjis made a friendly and soft smile, one was familiar with. However, it wasn't turned towards Imina, but rather for the elven warrior.

"Emeane. Vorguno. Nokt, Mikt. Cissha. Kuzan. You too. I made you worry. And put you through effort. However... the worries and struggles ahead, will be shared by us all together."

The recognition of services, was aimed towards elves.

The reactions were different for each. Those relieved, those letting out happy shouts, those laughing in grim manner, nodding with innocent expression, distorting the edges of lips sarcastically.

Imina——cast a sideways glance at their reactions, at the chest of his sister's body, the body of his mother in the back of the house, at Shirjis' smile over his head——and thought vaguely.

Since when.

When was it that this had begun. When was it that this was decided.

That night in full moon, the serious match with Imina.

Or maybe it was when the king of the elven country had changed.

Or maybe, even further in the past, when he had met Imina and Uruha——.

Don't know. I don't know, but,

"Shir...jis."

There's only one thing to make clear.

That was,

"Look at me. Look at Nee-san. Look at Mom. At the village, at everyone in this village!"

Imina has——Imina Haimatie has,

"Was it you? Everything... was it you that did it?!"

Family, home, best friend, he lost everything.

No, he didn't lose it.

He was deprived of it, by this guy——Shirjis Endveil.

"That's right."

Shirjis finally looked his way.

He looked down on Imina and nodded. Killing all emotions, cold, as if he was a stranger.

"I did it. It was done on my orders."

Imina no longer wondered why.

Would he answer if Imina asked? And what if he was answered. Would Imina's feelings flow away somewhere? Would everyone in the village be revived? Would the village be restored? Would his mother and sister laugh again?

"...ha."

Imina stood up. Hit by the Ogre——by Lakshus changed with elves evocation, his side was in dull pain and even breathing was painful. But, he couldn't care less about that.

He picked up the sword. It was too heavy for Imina to handle, the spirit energy tube was empty, it was a sword that could be used for its metallic properties. It was insufficient as a weapon, but he couldn't care less.

Yeah, that's right. *He couldn't care less.*

This guy's circumstances too. Situation on Imina's side too. Playing and running around the hills together, sweating as they clashed wooden swords, happy days——he *couldn't care less about them any more.*

"Shirjis...!"

He shouted the name of his former best friend. Putting everything into his negative fury.

This was different from usual sword practice. It was also different from the serious match from that night. He held his sword to kill his enemy rather than defeat his opponent. The glare wasn't challenging Shirjis for duel, but from the will to kill.

That's right. I'll kill. Kill him. I have to kill him.

He betrayed us. Me, Uruha, Mom, he betrayed everyone in the village——!

Imina lowered his knee, pooled strength and swung the heavy sword with one hand. He pounced while rebounding with his left arm. The blow he released from above was faster than his consciousness. Anger and hatred might have drew out power that surpasses physical limits. With speed to which even magical beasts and demons couldn't catch up to, Imina swung the

magical sword.

However, the blade still didn't reach.

To Imina's eyes, it just looked as if something flashed in front of him.

Regardless of that he moved of it and swung the magical sword in the gap of it.

Shirjis' sword flashed overhead and the touch on the sword——no, more weight than that was lost.

"……?!!"

The right arm swinging, retaining the momentum didn't have the forearm.

Shirjis cut it off with a single slash.

Imina's balance was lost and he fell over.

While rolling on the ground he realized what happened. The blow that was supposed to decide everything was cut down before it was released. Moreover, the opponent didn't even poise his sword. He outdid him while standing upright, he cut off Imina's arm as he started to attack.

What made it possible wasn't swordsmanship.

By gathering spirit energy from the land and pouring it into his own flesh, Shirjis increased his reflexes, reaction rate, as well as bodily abilities like vision and strength.

——Organic necromancy... was it!

Shirjis from the past wouldn't ever use it, a technique only available to elves.

Only genuine strength at work in the fair and square match with swords, that was the common understanding between the two, it was the proof of the two's determination to become strong together. Even during the serious match practice of that night, this agreement wasn't broken.

Now, it was easily scrapped.

"NnNGHOOOOO!"

Imina stood up after licking the ground. Just having an arm cut off won't stop him. In front of him was no longer the best friend with whom he competed. No——precisely because he was once his best friend, that he hated him even more, an enemy to take revenge on.

Supporting his body with remaining arm, he raised his leg and released a kick. No matter how much his body was reinforced he won't be able to avoid this attack from a blind spot.

As intended, Shirjis didn't avoid it. But it wasn't because he didn't see it. Even if it's from a blind spot, an attack of a human was pointless in the first place.

Shirjis leg reinforced by organic necromancy didn't even budge.

The recoil felt as if Imina kicked a big tree. Instead, Imina fell on his back.

Finally Shirjis responded to Imina's attack. He swung his long sword.

This time he cut off the left leg at the knee. Just like the right arm earlier, it was cut off and rolled away.

"Aa ...oo... OO-AAAAAAAAAAAAA!!"

Many times Imina roared. It wasn't scream of pain. It wasn't scream induced by loss of body parts. Hatred, rage, hatred, complaint, curse, resenment, mixed in it were all such feelings existing in this world, it wasn't enough to call it murderous intent, it was *wrath.*

His throat shook, he had a feeling he shouted Shirjis' name. Not just his. Uruha's, Mother's, Lakshus, acquaintances from the village. These weren't from anger but from nostalgia and sadness. Warm and painful thoughts crossed his mind.

They mixed in and penetrated his body, they felt like cold metal.

Imina had probably——stood up on one leg, stretched out his remaining left arm and tried to grasp Shirjis' neck. Was he able to move to the point where he stood up and stretched his hand, he wondered. Or maybe, he was unable to even stand up. He didn't know.

That's because, in middle of the screams,

"Imina Haimatie... farewell."

Shirjis' long sword tore deeply through Imina's belly,

"I won't apologize nor atone. I shall move on."

And turning the slash backwards he penetrated Imina's heart.

Imina's vision dyed red had begun to dim. He could no longer tell the taste of the blood overflowing from his mouth. He lost sensation in his limbs. The smell of entrails and flames covering the village had become distant.

With his remaining hearing, he vaguely heard their conversation.

"Shirjis, can I make this one into a demon?"

"No."

"Why? This boy looks like he'd come out well."

"Stop this. This is my last selfishness. I want at least those three to return to earth."

"That's a shame. But well, it can't be helped."

But their words, *only* sounded in his eardrums.

Imina's consciousness was overwritten by darkness and dissolved in the air.

It was the sound that he last perceived before losing consciousness and the sound was the first thing he perceived after regaining it.

"...r...y. So..... ...'m...rr... I'm...rry."

A sound of something trickling on him.

Dazed, he comfortably floated in the pond in his heart, sound shook his eardrums, his brain caught the words.

"I'm s...r...y. I'm so..r... ...'m sor... y. I'm sorry."

They were repeated apologies.

At the same time it was also atonement.

Along with the awakening of his consciousness, he understood that someone was embracing his skin. Warm body temperature, trembling arms and drops falling on his cheeks one after another.

He was too lazy to open his eyes. A great deal of effort was required to open one eyelid. But his awakening didn't stop, he didn't have the desire to fall asleep again. That's why, he opened them.

As he focused his blurry vision, there, he saw a tearful face.

"Imina... Imina."

His name was called. Even as she sobbed and spilled tears, the voice was beautiful like a bell.

The white skin like porcelain was flushed from crying. Her cute facial features were wrinkled. Tears pooling on her long eyelashes have overflowed. Bluish silver hair was hanging down, tickling Imina's cheeks.

"Elli...s."

Imina responded——calling the girl's name. His throat rattled.

"Imina...I'm sorry——I'm sorry, I'm sorry."

Just when did they reunite. He felt like he hasn't seen her face for a long time. It hasn't changed much. Her sobbing expression was the same she had when she tumbled, fell down and injured herself as a child.

Absent-mindedly, he felt nostalgic.

With time all his five senses returned. Imina's head was lying down on top of Ellis's knees. She seemed to have been crouching and hugging his head.

When he put strength in his fingertips, they moved. Strange, he thought. That's because he could properly feel the right arm and left leg Shirjis cut off earlier.

In that case, was that a dream. Thinking of it, it was impossible. Shirjis turning villagers into monsters and hurting Uruha and Lilu who were like family to him.

——*No, it was no dream.*

Imina pushed Ellis away and jumped as if repelled from her.

His mouth was filled with taste of iron rust and he felt sick. It didn't change even when he breathed in. That's because the air itself outside has been stained by the smell of blood.

He checked his right arm and left leg with his own eyes. They were properly connected. Or to be precise, *they were reconnected*. As if grafted. In the slashed place there was adhesive——a hardened, painted red adhesive.

Imina tried touching his left breast. His upper body was naked. The cut out wound from the shoulder to the belly and the pierced left breast were filled up in the same way, leaving scars behind.

"You did...?"

He turned around and asked Ellis.

Organic necromancy elves use. So it could also heal wounds.

"I'm sorry... I'm sorry, Imina."

Mixed in with her sobs were just apologies.

He looked at the surroundings.

This was the end of the village, on top of a small hill.

It was the pasture that was the playground of the four, Imina, Shirjis, Uruha and Ellis. The place he was in wasn't beside his home——where he was knocked down. Surely, Ellis must have carried him so far.

The day was almost over already.

Despite the dark, the scenery could be seen well. He could see the things in the distance awfully well.

Houses had become mountains of smouldering charcoal, smoke rose from them.

Here and there were corpses. Corpses of those killed by demons and magical beasts, corpses of those who burned down in fire, corpses which seemed to be of those killed by elves and, the corpses of demons and magical beasts themselves.

Some of the corpses were wriggling. Not the corpses themselves. It was something breaking out from the corpses' bellies, growing out of corpses and extending, reminiscent of insects coming out the nurseries, caterpillars out of the summer grass, wire worms coming out of mantis' belly. In other words, he noticed something like that.

Using corpses as nutrients, the plants grew. At speed unthinkable of with human common sense, in shapes human society was unfamiliar with, plants that didn't belong to human world.

"Tha...t's..."

After looking at it well, Imina realized the scenery was different from that of the village he remembered. Across the village here and there were green bushes.

"...elven... forest?"

What was happening, was obvious.

Not tired with just destroying the village, killing all the villagers, they planted seeds in human corpses. No——they killed people in order to plant seeds. In order to provide the calamitous flowers and trees nutrients to sprout. After growing they would suck dense spirit energy from the earth for themselves, then start releasing it into atmosphere. After a night human world's plants would wither, beast be chased away and instead, magical beasts and demons would rush in instead, completing elf territory.

In other words, it was a process of incorporation.

Imina's birthplace was incorporated into Fairy Country, it looked like it was transformed.

His gaze defined his home. The whole area was half-covered in calamitous trees and bushes. The body of his sister and mother couldn't be found, he had no idea where were they. Surely, they must have become another seedbed.

"Uu, aa, aaa..."

He put five fingers of his left hand on his chest, he scratched the place where his heart was

penetrated earlier. His five fingers of his right hand on the pasture soil he once played on, piercing it. Floating in his mind were villagers', mother's and sister's face. And as if eroding it, devastating the village, the elves, Shirjis appearance.

"Aaa... aa, aaAAAaAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!!"

Imina screamed.

As if tearing his soul apart. Several layers of rage had poured out of his body. As if putting the entirety of his heart into a curse. He collected all the regrets of killed people.

He gouged the meat on his breast with nails, his nails gouging the ground bled, his torn throat was filled with blood.

With tears at the ends of his eyes——with a smile on the edge of his lips, he screamed.

"...kill! I'll kill them! These filthy elves... Shirjis! I will, with these hands! I won't let a single one escape! Definitely... kill them, kill them, kill them!"

"I'm sorry... Imina, I'm sorry."

And——as Ellis repeated apologies clinging to his back, relaying her body temperature to him, Imina suddenly stopped cursing.

Ellis.

That's right,

"Ellis...?"

That was, the girl's behind him——an *elf's* name.

Ellis *Endveil*.

Shirjis's little sister.

He slowly turned around. Stared intently at her crying face. The siblings didn't resemble each other much. But, she was his relative. Almost unconsciously he extended his arms.

At her, white throat.

Grasping it with both hands, he pushed her down with his body weight. She didn't fight back as he straddled her.

But,

"I'm sorry... I'm sorry."

She just continued apologizing as she sobbed.

"Wh...y."

Slowly putting strength into his both hands strangling her, Imina spat out.

"Why... you all, such a thing!"

The thoughts he couldn't clash against Shirjis, he clashed against his little sister instead.

Ellis lightly shook her head.

From her facial expression and gestures, he immediately realized she didn't know anything. They knew each other for long. Even without saying it, he could understand what she wanted to say.

Shirjis assaulted the village in secret from Ellis.

Ellis learned that from somewhere and rushed over.

But, by the time she arrived at the village everything was already over——

Yeah——that's definitely how it was.

Just, this girl didn't know anything and yet, I.

"Yo...u... Ellis. You."

He then realized that his fingers on her throat were trembling.

It wasn't from murderous intent. More like opposite, he was confused. Despite the resentment, curses and hatred filling his chest——he was unable to hit her.

That's why, he asked.

"You're, mine... what? What am I... to you?"

His family until yesterday had become corpses.

His home village until yesterday had become a monstrous forest.

His neighbours until yesterday had become hateful enemy.

His best friend until yesterday, had become the enemy to take revenge upon for his family and home village.

Then——this girl, now,

"I'm..."

Ellis smiled.

While sobbing, while being strangled by Imina, she still smiled.

And responded.

"I'm, Ellis. Ellis who loves Imina very much."

It wasn't sympathizing with grieving Imina, neither it was apology she repeated until a moment

ago, it was pure love.

Slowly, one of her hands was raised.

Approaching Imina's face.

"More than someone like Nii-sama, more than my home town, more than Endveil clan, I prefer Imina. Imina is more important. That's why... my everything, I give to you."

And as if accepting his hatred.

"If you want to kill me, kill me. If that calms you even a little, then do so. As much as possible torment me, as much.... as you like, kill me, Imina."

"Aa..."

plap

Water droplets fell on Ellis' cheeks.

That it was his own tears, he understood from the blurring vision.

Looking as his and Ellis tears mixed, he understood an emotion inside his chest.

——I'm...

"Don't screw... around."

He slowly retracted his ten fingers on Ellis throat.

"...I won't kill you. As if... I could.'

That's right. He can't do something like killing her. Definitely not.

After all this girl wasn't his enemy's sister. Nor a hateful elf.

She was, different. Different.

She was the only one who didn't change. She didn't change. She remained unchanged.

Just like yesterday, no, even now she was the only left with him——

"You're, my... last family."

He stroked her soft, silver hair.

Burying his face in her chest, Imina muttered while exhaling deeply.

"Thank you for saving me. My beloved Ellis."

4

With the information relayed on the end of year 1499 of Imperial Calendar, the Imperial City was in uproar.

The eastern end of Midgalz, the Salaido village and surrounding areas on the border with Fairy Country were destroyed by elven hands and absorbed into Fairy Country. In other words——it was the declaration of war by the elves, the start of invasion.

In prehistoric, in the age of myths there was one Fairy War.

Still, at first they were collected. It was because the empire hold sovereignty over the majority of the continent. Fairy Country was at most a single feather of the bird. It's estimated population was ten thousand times lower, the estimated land area was one hundred and twenty times lower. It was considered just another troublesome addition to the skirmishes with southern barbarians, that was the degree. The Era Festival of year 1500 was also made glamorous.

However, their perception was soon overturned.

For elven organic necromancy, human numerical advantage was not a problem. A flock of hundred magical beasts and demons could scatter away a troop of thousand like a storm. One elven warrior could single-handedly trample over the a hundred soldiers. Fully equipped villages with brigades stationing in it were destroyed overnight.

The land elves had occupied had entirely changed into Fairy Country——changing into "Elven Forest", making recapture impossible. Humans were unable to step inside the dense spirit energy of the Fairy Country.

In other words, if they're pushed away the land becomes permanently lost and humans were unable to regain it. Before long, within one year a percent of Midgalz Empire was eroded, the Imperial City had finally realized that this war is incomparable with the skirmish with southern barbarians and it was the second coming of the Fairy War from the mythical era. The Era Festival was closed immediately. There was no longer any time to celebrate a hundred years of prosperity. Because, a once-in-thousand years crisis had come.

A large-scale recruitment was carried out, the eyes of the mercenaries changed colours, ironworks and workshops were bustling, study of object necromancy had become increasingly popular and the commoners screamed because of raised taxes. Fortresses were made through rushed civil engineering work over days and night nearby the front line, villages and towns built barriers in preparation for war. The entire country had left itself in the large flow of war.

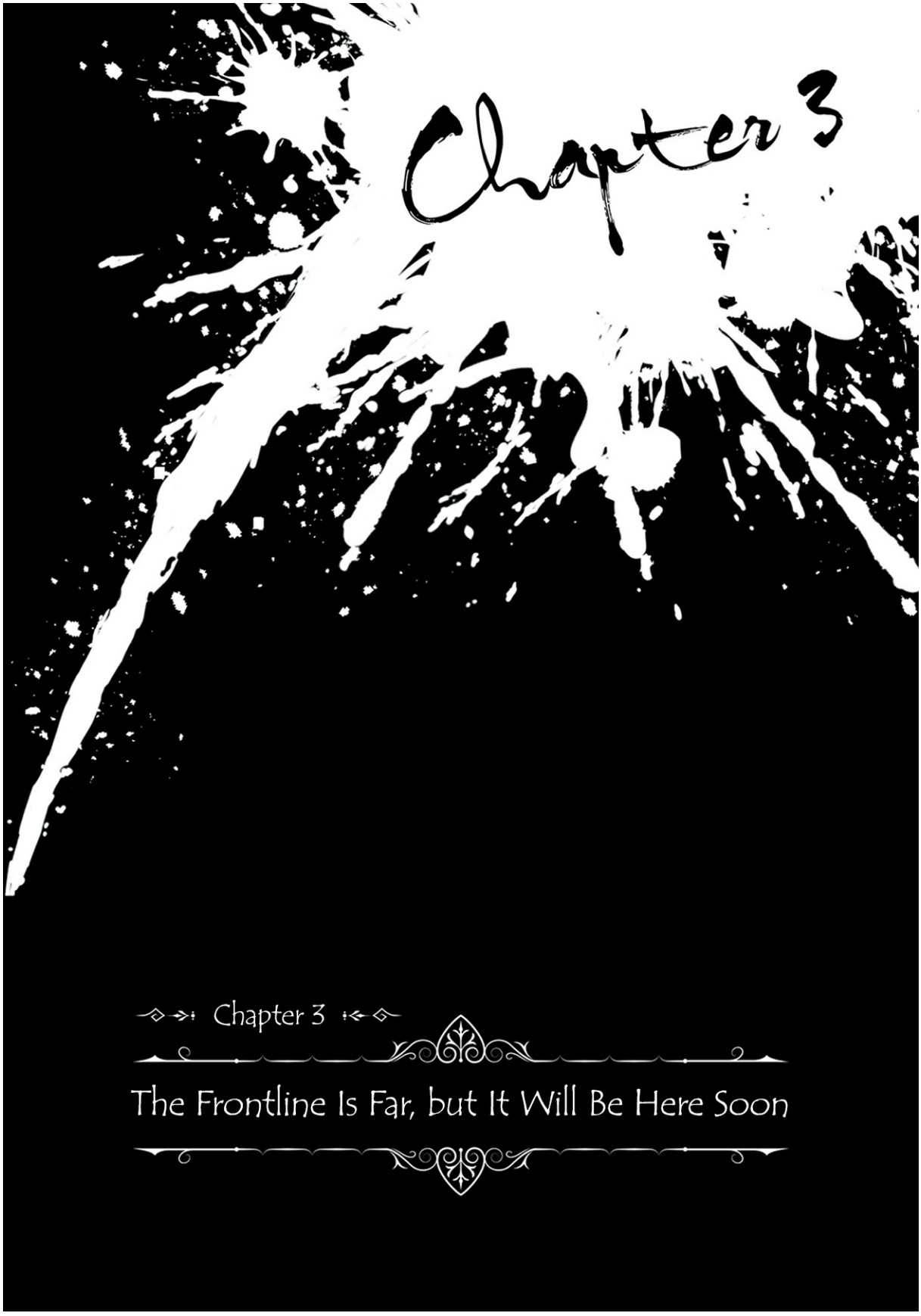
After getting serious the Empire was successful in bringing the war into a stalemate when it lost about two percent of the country, turning the situation around has failed. Elves maintained the front line, so that they are able to attack whenever there's an opportunity, they were on high alert.

And, time flowed.

Midgalz Empire's Calendar, year 1504.

Four years have passed since the first elven invasion on the Salaido village, it's February.

North of the Empire, in the city Yusala, about two thousand kilometres from the Imperial City a pair of a boy and a girl had come to visit. Yusala was a drill city that fostered young soldiers. Glaring at each other with elves in the war's front line, in other words, it was a town that faced the the Astozellen great fortress in the east.


Chapter 3
Chapter 3
The Frontline Is Far, but It Will Be Here Soon

1

On this day too, the main street of the Yusala drill city was overflowing with soldier candidates.

In the centre of the city, on both sides of the stone pavement were lined up stalls.

The drill school's campus was on top of a hill, lodgings across the street. Between them there were plenty places to hang out and rest after the lectures were over, the merchants seemed to know that and sold tea and sweets aimed for young people as well as had fruits lined up on the serves. Every store had chairs and benches available at the edge, allowing people to eat and drink on spot after purchasing food.

The drill students were men and women from fourteen to twenty years old. Regardless of their age they were divided into four years depended on when they entered, there was about two hundred students in each year. About seventy percent of them were nobles and people from powerful families, the remaining thirty percent were commoners. After finishing the course, people with excellent grades were acknowledged and enlisted in the Royal Knights.

Of course, if they just want to become soldiers they don't have to enter the Royal Knights. Since the graduates are qualified officers, they can become mercenaries or part of aristocratic private military forces where at worst they become captains of troops of ten. But still, the overwhelming majority wished to become part of the Royal Knights troop. After all, it was a service from Imperial City. In other words, it was a service distant from the front line, they would be sent to live carefree lives as guards.

To add on to that, even if children of nobility and rich families with poor qualifications were enlisted to Royal Knights, it wouldn't have any impact on it. Even if they have entered drill school, they would at most become figureheads of private armies and would proceed on a path that doesn't share an edge with war.

Having such circumstances, the faces of the young people were overall bright, the town was crowded.

Even if two hundred kilometres of this city was the forefront of war.

Second Fairy War——the war named tentatively like that was very close to Yusala and yet far at the same time. Five days of crossing the mountains in a horse-drawn carriage, one day of transit with quick horses. The watchtowers weren't at a distance one could go to for a picnic there, and the noise couldn't be heard either so people didn't feel nor had awareness of the fact they were close to the front line. Although the great Astozellen fortress in the front line was at a stand-off for six months, if it was broken through by any chance the drill students weren't obligated to fight and would be evacuated.

Still, after being trained they seem to be entering very brave moods.

A stall with snacks on a main street.

Two drill students sitting on its terrace were in the middle of a blooming discussion on magical swords.

"Actually, Juelamil method is already old."

Tilting his ginger ale, a big boy spoke enthusiastically.

"In the first place. 'Changing the evocation depending on situation' in actual battle is... I wonder if it's possible in the current battlefield. It's certainly useful when two people are fighting. But, the enemies now are elves, as well as magical beasts and demons. There's no time to look at the opponent and pick a spirit energy tube for each one of them. It's better to focus on a single high-powered evocation, right?"

He had a rough and thick voice fitting his physique and also had a somehow unlikable atmosphere.

"Still, it's hard to say that Eftal method is the best isn't it?"

Responding to him, was a conspicuous boy with soft hair who felt somehow aloof from the world.

He held bread with dried meat sandwiched between it in one hand and somehow hassled—— still responded to the discussion.

"Certainly, I think there is a point in using up one evocation to the limit in the current war. Magical beasts and demons are just extreme beasts. All that's needed to kill them is to break through their hair, skin and bones. It's not necessary to make full use of exaggerated evocations. Also, by limiting the evocation one could limit the operative unit and the blade's structure, thus simplifying manufacturing process and including durability of the blade. The situations during which they melt from continuous operation of the evocation would happen less often. Both servicing it and mass production would be easier, looking from that point of view Eftal method is perfect."

"See, it's full of advantages."

"C'mon, listen till the end. To me, despite those advantages, I want to say that it doesn't escape the fundamental flaws of magical swords. You listened to the necromancy lecture, right?"

"Hey hey, you who always doses off during the lecture asks me that?"

Although the big boy responded ironically, the soft-haired boy shrugged and smiled.

"I never miss important things. ...well, anyway. Both Juelamil and Eftal methods are unable to activate the evocation once the spirit energy they're equipped with is exhausted. We humans are unable to use our flesh and blood to draw spirit energy from the ground like elves. In other words, we need spirit energy tubes no matter what. If you can use only one evocation before its exhausted, then which one is better? In fact, with a skilled user, the destructive power of Juelamil method is higher."

"It's not like that."

The blonde wrinkled his eyebrows in frustration.

"I know. But, even if you say it's not, in the end it's *still like that*."

The big boy fell silent.

The soft-haired shrugged and using the opportunity, ate the remaining bread all at once.

After crudely chewing it he poured himself grape wine,

"To resolve this drawback, one would have to suck up and compress spirit energy, the processing technology for that... right now there's no choice but to do it in the magical sword factory. But, you too on your first year went on a tour in the factory, right? There's no way that absurdly big equipment can be miniaturized and mounted on the magical sword's engine. Above all, they have the built-in organic parts of the spirit energy accumulating device. They rot and die over the time and have to be replaced, it's too unreasonable to operate that on the battlefield."

"...still, I think the Juelamil method is outdated."

A response not suiting his rugged body, almost sulking.

The boy with soft hair licked a piece of bread off his fingertip and with "good grief", he said.

"Hey, Fream. I can understand you're frustrated after losing to Vint in practice battle, but isn't it bad to blame it on a weapon?"

"......!!"

Fream——the big boy made an expression as if he was poked where it hurts.

He frowned and scratched his head.

"Yeah, you're right. It's just as you say, Sashtal."

Surrendering to the soft-haired boy——Sashtal, he scratched his head shyly,

"I know that myself, that talking like this is pathetic."

And placed the wooden jug with ale on top of the table.

Then he leaned against his own chair and stared at his weapon.

Wrapped in a cloth, a long spear.

Pointing at it lightly, Fream sighed.

"But well, being told that clearly is annoying. I've gotten this guy in the drill school, it's a magical spear my family splurged on you know? Saying the cheap Eftal is inconveniencing, they kindly splurged on the Juelamil method you see?"

Magical swords were valuable. Juelamil method weapon was as expensive as a house, it was incredibly expensive for commoners. In fact——there were people from even more rural areas than Fream, with ancestors living from hunting, they purchased a mass-produced Eftal method daggers thanks to taking a debt.

"And yet, Vint... the only son of venerable Culias Marquis household, despite having lots of gold is using a damn cheap Eftal weapon. Despite using a cheap weapon, he had a brilliant victory against an opponent wielding a Juelamil magical spear!"

As Fream chagrined, Sashtal smiled wryly.

"He's pragmatic despite being a noble. Doesn't seem gaudy at all."

"Aaah? Sticking up for him? As I thought, you two of the enforcement branch are thinkin' alike eh?"

"If I did, I wouldn't be listening to your complaints."

Sashtal's aloof attitude was undisturbed, he fluttered his hand dodging Fream.

Just, he narrowed his eyes slightly and his tone had slight seriousness mixed in,

"Well, I can tell wanting to blame a weapon from frustration after losing. But, you shouldn't blame the weapon *your family had gathered a large sum of money for,* I think. If anything, blame your lack of skill."

For a moment, Fream was silent.

But, before long he met Sashtal's gaze meekly and,

"You're right, my bad. I was rude to *this guy* and to my family that bought him for me."

For a commoner in a drill school, having a magical sword was a crystallization of effort of their families and the hope entrusted to them.

"Yup. Honesty is your good point."

Sashtal laughed and hit Fream's shoulder.

"Well, it can't be helped. Vint has good pedigree, excellent results and is good looking, like a honour student sample. I too, when we have to act together as enforcement branch feel like complaining about him. If that guy's a deer, then I'm a monkey and you're a boar."

"You're free to make comparisons like that as you were born in a hunter's household, but don't involve me in it."

Then——Fream who filled his jug with ale again,

".....nn? Hey, look."

With a frown, the two looked towards the next stall.

Because it was behind Sashtal, he turned around.

There alone, stood a girl.

It was a girl who had her mantle's hood put on deeply on her eyes. Almost as if she didn't want her face to be seen. But on the other hand, she wasn't wary enough from the neck and below and the front was open. On her breasts and from below the short skirt her skin peeked out, it was incredibly glossy and captivating.

Not only her body was attractive. The face peeking out from below the hood——in the end, wasn't completely hidden either——was incredibly striking.

In one word, lovely.

Round eyes, crystal clear facial features, shapely eyebrows, soft-looking lips, everything was exquisitely placed on her face. Her somewhat troubled and tempting expression tempted men to give her protection. Her bluish-silver hair was like that of an elf.

Of course, there was no way an elf could be in a place like this, in the first place, silver hair wasn't uncommon among humans. But, the combination of silver hair and the striking beautiful appearance made her worthy of the epithet "like an elf". It should be noted that even now during the war with elves, it was used as the greatest tribute to somebody's appearance.

She didn't wear the Yusala drill school's uniform. Since she was wearing a fabric cloth she must have been a traveller.

It seemed like she was trying to buy something. Panicking in front of fruits and nuts in a box. Maybe she was looking for the wallet, as she was looking through her chest pocket and the waist pockets. Because of these gestures of hers she didn't notice she displayed more skin.

And, her appearance, expression and all her gestures——had caused the drill students hanging out at the next stall to whistle in a vulgar way. The one Fream rebuked was finding fault with wasn't the girl, but them.

"Those guys..."

"Caskes' henchmen."

This is troublesome, Sashtal thought.

It was an aristocrat just like Vint the two were talking about earlier, but he was just opposite of Vint, completely contrasting with him. He felt privileged and had a bad attitude, the worst fellow who thought of himself highly and one should be careful with. Time after time he acted violently in the city, but because he repeatedly silenced victims these were only rumours.

The traveller girl seemed to have caught their eyes.

Caskes Kilishiaham——the leader of the bunch was a third son of a Marquis——but, as the group expected he stood up with a grin.

"Milady, are you troubled with something?"

He crept up to her from behind and called out. His expression wasn't noble at all, completely vulgar.

"Hyaa?!"

The surprised girl's body twitched and she turned around. Her face behind the hood was timid, but rather than making Caskes feel like protecting her it must have aroused his sadism.

"Do you want fruits? Or maybe nuts? I'll buy them for you."

"N-no umm, don't mind me."

The girl seemed confused.

"It's fine it's fine. By the way, you aren't a drill student right? Why did you come for to this city? Maybe, you are looking for a job? I'll guide you. See I'm mostly familiar with all the stores around here. If you *get along* with me I'll introduce you. How about that."

As to take advantage, Caskes' attitude was aggressive. Confident of his position he took his opponent off-guard. A mere female traveller, he'll be able to do however he pleases with her, he thought.

Actually, taking Kilishiaham's house influence into consideration, there were few stores that would refuse. If she got along his invitation she could pick any job she would like. If she didn't ——that wouldn't trouble him either.

"First to deepen our friendship, how about we talk for a while at that store? They have delicious sweets."

"Damn, can't he cut it out."

"Give up."

Sashtal stopped Fream whose anger won over and was about to stand up.

"Your position will get worse. At best you're just one year his senior, it'll be troublesome if he has an eye on you."

"Are you saying I should just sit and watch?"

"Yeah, that's right. *You* sit and watch. I'll go alone."

While thinking its a suicide, Sashtal stood up.

Honestly, he thought it's troublesome. In the first place, he didn't have the personality with sense of justice. Helping a traveller that wasn't even a drill student was too much a pain in the ass.

However, despite it being troublesome,

"As an *enforcement executive*, I can't keep silent when I run into such a thing in such a place. If I do, I'll be scolded by the representative."

Enforcement——it was autonomous institution in the drill school, he was one of its members.

Of course he wasn't recommended nor a candidate. He was an appointed by the drill school's student representative, it was decided single-handedly. However, that didn't mean he wanted to abandon the responsibility.

Sashtal thought he'd be glad if Vint Culias whom they talked about earlier was here. Contrary to Sashtal, he'd gladly welcome this.

Caskes didn't notice Sashtal stand up.

As his comrades watched it proudly, with a grin,

"Now, come. I'll treat you to a feast."

Over-familiar, he put a hand on the girl's shoulder.

But, contrary to Caskes expectations——the girl furrowed her eyebrows uncomfortably and slapped his hand away.

"Don't touch me."

"...aa?"

Caskes' voice turned low and arrogant.

"What's with you, this attitude."

Sashtal started feeling impatient.

While thinking it serves that despicable aristocrat just right, he'd prefer if she refused him in more gentle manner. That was more like a provocation.

If it goes bad, it might get out of hand.

"Don't touch me, I said."

The girl firmly glared at Caskes.

"Hee, my goodness, acting strong."

However, Caskes made a light smile. He wasn't angry. Instead, he thought of making her cheeky face cry. His gaze turned around freely, licking her chest and thighs.

As expected, staying on sidelines for any longer would be bad.

Sashtal took a deep breath and was about to call out to him, restraining Caskes.

"Nn...?"

A figure walking straight towards the girl was reflected in Sashtal's field of view.

It was a boy.

Seventeen, or maybe eighteen, he looked young but might have been older.

Of course, he wasn't a drill student. He looked like a traveller. A crudely-worn thumbed cloak. A sword visible from behind the tattered hem. Wide and somewhat short blade, a double-edged one-handed sword——probably a falchion.

Ruffled dark red hair. He was a short person for a man. However, his eyes were incredibly sharp, just by walking he let out a presence of a ferocious beast.

The boy stopped in front of the girl and muttered.

"Ellis, don't just wander as you like."

The girl——she seemed to be called Ellis——responded, depressed.

"I'm sorry, Imina. See, they sell walnuts so I..."

"You don't have a purse, do you."

"Y-yes. After coming to the store, I remembered Imina has the purse..."

"That's why I told you not to separate from me."

The boy——called Imina had a blunt attitude. But contrary to his tone, he stroked he girl's head over the hood with gentle movements.

"The inn seems to be over there. Let's stay here for a few days and rest."

"Umm, Imina. I'll use walnuts and make brea..."

"I know. If you have ingredients I heard it's fine if you use the kitchen."

"Really?"

Ellis' face suddenly shone. Including Sashtal, all the onlookers gasped. They were completely charmed. Earlier she was fearful and timid,but now she just had a happy expression. Like a water lilly blooming in front of them, it had no equal.

The boy looked towards the stall's shopkeeper.

"Walnuts, can I get a bag of them?"

"S-sure. Umm... two hundred pennies."

Probably the old shopkeeper was also fascinated by the girl. He spread the bag out in panic.

But, there was a single person who didn't fall for her smile.

"Hey, ...wait a second, you."

It was Caskes, who was quarrelling with Ellis.

His presence was riddled with displeasure, dissatisfaction and anger. No wonder. As he was in middle of harassing a cheeky girl, he was ignored by the boy who suddenly appear to take her away, not even shown any hostility. Even more so that he was accustomed to flaunting his identity. It must have been an intolerable insult to him.

"What's with these antics? Even an unfamiliar countryman should know better how to behave in this city."

Moving in front of the boy, he glared.

Height-wise, Caskes was taller. Glaring with intimidation downwards,

"Listen all right? Drilling students is at this city's core... we are responsible for the future of Royal Knights. You commoners will be guarded by us so a big and arrogant attitude won't be tolerated."

Still his demonstration, didn't go through to the boy——to Imina.

"So this, is the drill city Yusala."

He muttered to himself.

"...haa, I paid it a visit four years late haven't I."

In self-ridicule the edges of his lips distorted, and,

"Hey! I said, don't ignore me...!"

Caskes finally passed the boiling point and put his hand on the thing at his waist.

The Estoc-type magical sword purchased thanks to his parent's wealth. The tension had run through the agape crowd.

However, the sword wasn't unsheathed.

**pam*,* ——and.

Without any signs ahead of it, Imina's right hand hit Caskes face from the side. That's how it looked like those who were looking from the sidelines. But those who didn't receive combat training and the shopkeeper, they didn't see any arm movement. Also, it was actually hit in the jaw.

Immediately after, Caskes fell on his knees.

Like a puppet with its strings cut he fell on the ground and didn't even flinch.

Behind Sashtal, Fream let out a voice of admiration. A splendid and accurate blow——even the school practicals' instructors wouldn't be able to imitate it.

"!! ...bastard!"

The henchmen who were looking from a distance have all at once stood up, hostile.

There were eight of them. Each of them was a noble, but they were Caskes cronies' of low pedigree. As underlings they probably couldn't overlook what was done to their boss because of appearances.

"What's with you guys. This guy's friends?"

Before the eight's hostility, Imina didn't falter in the least.

He spoke completely disinterested.

"He only fainted so don't worry. I don't have a hobby of quarrelling."

"Wha...? You bastard, are you insulting us?!"

The henchmen were frenzied. "I don't have hobby of quarrelling"——it was equal to saying "with you guys it'll be at most a quarrel".

Either they didn't understand their position, were unable to withdraw, or maybe both. Eight people pulled out their weapons in unison. Claymore, wand, mace, daggers——each and all of them were expensive swords purchased with their parents' money.

"Heyhey.'

Behind Sashtal, Fream's chair creaked.

"This is turning into somethin' big."

Of course it was, usage of magical swords within this city was strictly prohibited by the school regulations outside of emergencies. If they do it their grades would suffer, at worst they can be expelled.

"Hey, hurry up and stop th..."

Reminded by Fream, Sashtal however felt a different kind of impatience.

He frowned.

Sashtal wasn't worried about the boy.

It was the opposite.

Perhaps because he was hunting in the mountains from an early age, he felt these things intuitively. And his intuition was telling him.

Rather than Caskes' cronies, rather than the evocation's outburst that could deal large damage to the city, there was something more dangerous.

It was that quietly standing boy. The one the girl called Imina.

It wasn't that he let out any thirst for blood. He didn't enter combat readiness. However, that's why. It's because despite the absence of will to fight——*because he didn't feel like fighting at all, the oppressive feeling like that of a wounded beast he let out,* made him feel beyond ordinary.

He wasn't an ordinary person, that was clear. There was a possibility he was already a mercenary veteran at that age.

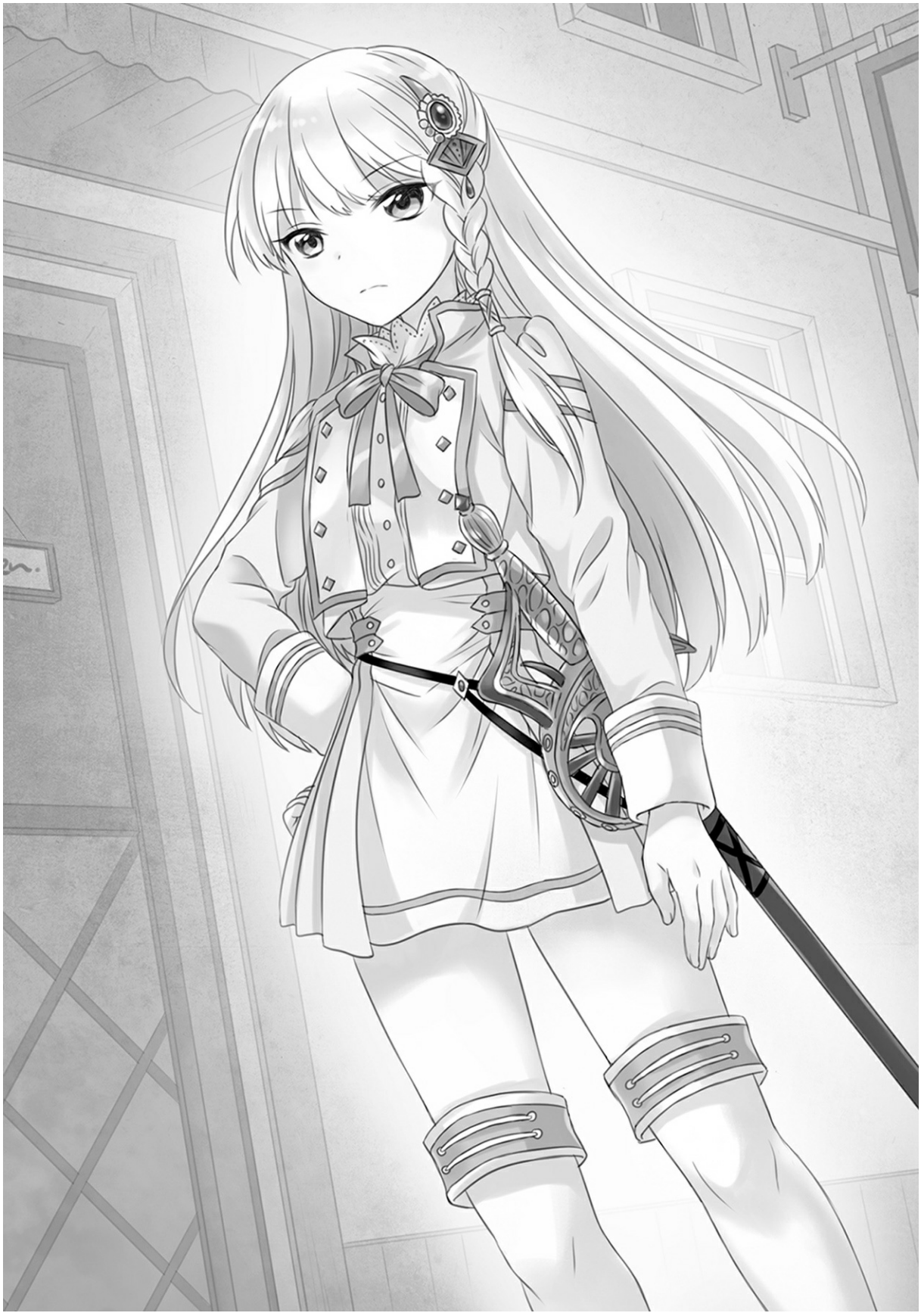
Of course, Caskes' henchmen didn't notice the boy's dreadfulness.

Behind the confronting boy, the girl narrowed her eyes.

This is bad——they'll go at it.

That's why Sashtal determined himself and was about to shout "wait!".

At that time.



"...you all, what are you attempting here?"

A voice of a woman, as if a sword was being unsheathed had resounded in the tense air of the

place.

It wasn't loud. Calm, if anything. Nevertheless, it resounded well.

The onlookers, Caskes' henchmen and Fream from behind Sashtal have all looked at *her* and gasped.

"Re...representative."

Someone muttered in daze.

A single girl stood there.

Sparkling blonde hair extending to her waist. Hair ornaments decorated with jet-black corals. Perky nose and neat features. Her eyes were somewhat cold, the strictness in her entire body and her beauty attracted viewers, naturally making them correct their posture.

She was wearing Yusala drill school's uniform, but rather than general student's black with blue bordering, she wore a white one with cherry-coloured bordering and it gave a totally different impression. The designs of the decorations were added on as well, proving she was in this school——or rather, in entire city she was a special existence.

The knight sword hanging at her waist was inscribed with "Raika Tenseki" which meant "Trace of Heavenly Lightning's Flash". It was a magical sword created by a famous sword-smith who had no equal in Midgalz Empire, Shuleli Saimond. Shuleli's magical swords were of high quality and low number. Not counting commoners, it was hard for even nobles to purchase them.

Her name was Milifica. Milifica Yusala Astozellen.

Yusala Drill School's representative, Midgalz Empire's Astozellen royal families twelfth heir to the throne and the next and the second child of Yusala's duke. Rather than a mild noble, she was from royal family with long history.

And at the same time, the enforcement staff Sashtal was serving, an immediate supervisor so to speak.

Milifica grimly let out a voice again.

"What are you doing, I have asked. Did someone permit you unsheathe your blades in the city premises?"

"Haa... no!!"

Caskes' henchmen one after another discarded their swords and got down on their knees.

Still, Milifica's expression remained steep.

"This is a serious violation of school regulations. Arrest them."

At these words, the students who earlier sat unconcerned have ran over and restrained the non-resisting henchmen. They were splendidly small-minded, but it was no wonder. If they continued to stay at the sidelines the suspicions might be also extended to them. Being

suspected of being Caskes' comrades would be unbearable.

On the other hand, Sashtal was relieved.

Thanks to her intervention, the dreadful presence has disappeared from Imina.

Not just that, he stared at Milifica blankly. The change of atmosphere thanks to Her Royal Highness Princess Milifica has apparently paid off.

That's what Sashtal thought but——.

"Let's talk calmly in the campus, shall we. ...now then."

After ascertaining that everyone including unconscious Caskes' has been arrested, Milifica turned towards the two who weren't students, towards the boy and the girl.

With a light diplomatic smile,

"It seems we have inconvenienced you two... however, since I wasn't here to see everything, I do not know the situation. If possible, I would like to hear the full story, would you."

Be able to kindly answer. She was probably about to continue with.

But she interrupted in the middle and made a dubious expression.

"What happened?"

The traveller boy and girl——Imina and Ellis.

The two for some reason, turned astounded gazes towards Milifica.

Ellis' lips trembled.

"...it can't...be."

"Can't be? What do you mean?"

At the same time Milifica asked.

The action taken by Imina had amazed everyone on spot.

Just like Ellis he had lost his temper and facial expressions, then took a step forward. He extended his hands, held Milifica's shoulder——and of all things he wrapped her cheek with his palm, staring into her face.

"Uru...ha...?"

There was no one who noticed that the muttered word was someone's name.

That's because every single one——was stunned by the rude behaviour.

The moment everyone had returned to their senses, Milifica had shook his hands off and slapped him.

"......!! You insolent!"

paam, a simple sound had resounded in the main street.

2

The place they were guided to was the training centre.

It was a separate building standing side by side with school's.

The stone walls were piled up with emphasis on the robustness rather than the appearance, here and there were small scratches. The floor——on the ground there was fine sand, it looked perfect for bouncing away from it. The roof was wooden, on it there were large open windows without sliders for better ventilation, cold winter air from outside blew in through them.

Please use this, they were passed folded chairs made from iron bars and tanned leather. It was the same thing soldiers used to rest on the battlefield.

Were they not welcome, or maybe this was normal. Or maybe both. Although it didn't seem like they were treated as guests, the school's hallways they passed through weren't flashy either, making them think the school's traditions were very Spartan.

Of course——with that said, as expected of the drill school built by the royal family. The building design and the atmosphere had dignity despite the rustic look. The training centre too, if one looked well, there were beams on the ceiling and the cut-out stone was firm.

The location's size was roughly fifteen square metres. Since there was a sign "Seventh Training Centre" at the entrance doors, it meant there must have been another six of this size. Gold was used generously.

Imina stood in the corner of the training centre while thinking that and stared at the inside.

"I wonder if we'll be all right."

Next to him Ellis was sitting in a chair and looked up his way.

So he replied with a shrug.

"It certainly turned troublesome, but it's not like we'll be eaten."

"But, I'm..."

Not wearing the hood she was anxious. Before they entered the campus they took off their cloaks and they were taken away. They left their jackets with the guards, unable to go against their compelling tones. The manners and noise around them was also aristocratic.

Ellis constantly put her hands on her head——specifically, she was holding down the plasters on her ears. They were well hidden by her hair, but she was still anxious.

"Don't worry so much."

Her head was lightly bumped.

"If by off chance something happens, I'll protect you."

"...yup."

Ellis squinted and happily nodded.

"In the first place, it's my fault it turned out like that."

Imina made a bitter smile. In it, there was a slight criticism.

"It couldn't be helped."

It seemed like Ellis thought the same.

"They were alike... right."

"Yeah, though the hair colour and atmosphere were different."

He involuntarily forgot, that's how they were similar. Like *two peas in a pod.*

It seemed like she was a prominent person in this drill city. He ended up being incredibly disrespectful. Thanks to that they changed from being victims of a turmoil and were handled like this.

It'll be fine if they are released without any events. If possible, they didn't want to make it long.

In the first place, if he knew this was Drill City Yusala they wouldn't have stopped at the inn. If possible he didn't want to see it——*if by chance such a thing didn't happen, he would have learned in these buildings.*

He should have checked the map properly, he didn't pay attention to the city's name.

"I have kept you waiting."

Along with a well-sounding voice, the training centre's door has opened.

Entering, were three people. Two men, one woman.

Walking in the front was the blonde girl who slapped Imina.

As he thought, their facial features were exactly same. It could be said they had the same face.

As the one who died four years ago——his elder sister Uruha.

But if he looked at her intently, it was clear she wasn't Uruha. Her hair and atmosphere were different, the way she was bearing herself was completely alien.

"Ours wasn't this elegant."

Moreover, his sister was no longer in this world. She couldn't be Uruha.

"Did you say something?"

"No, nothing."

He looked to the side and played dumb.

The girl similar to Uruha had pulled one of her legs slightly backwards and introduced herself together with a short explanation.

"My apologies for late introduction. My name is Milifica Yusala Astozellen. I serve as the representative of this city and the drill school."

Hearing her name, Imina opened his eyes wide.

"Astozellen? ...so you were a princess. Well, no wonder you got angry."

Even if he was born and raised in a remote village, he at least knew the surname of the royal family. Although, he didn't know how high was the status of Yusala branch family.

Still——to think she would be a spitting image of a princess, if Uruha were to be alive, she would definitely be happy about this.

As he thought of something that couldn't be changed, his expression stiffened.

And he was blamed for it by a person standing behind the princess.

"You, aren't you acting disrespectful for a while now?"

It was a tall man, his age was about same as Imina's. Considering his elegant features he must have been a moderate noble.

As not to aggravate him, Imina shrugged.

"Ah, sorry. I didn't mean to offend anyone."

"I'm saying that your way of speaking itself is rude towards the Princess..."

"Give it a rest, Vint."

The man standing next to the one called Vint had restrained him.

He had frivolous attitude and his standing posture was also candid. Honestly speaking, no grace could be felt from him, possibly he wasn't an aristocrat.

"We're within the school grounds. It's not 'Princess' but 'Milifica' here. If you want to speak with respect to her, call her 'representative'. If you don't do that, you'll be the one disrespecting her, right?"

"Sashtal, don't divert the topic. It's not about me, but about this man..."

"Cease it, you two."

The princess——Milifica furrowed her eyebrows and glanced at the two.

"The disrespect I have suffered from him wasn't as part of the royal family nor representative, but as a lady."

And then she turned back towards Imina,

"Do you have a justification for your actions?"

He could only respond in formal manner. Imina honestly explained himself.

"You, being spitting image of my dead older sister has agitated me. Also, I apologize for my speech. A country bumpkin like me has no idea about the royal family."

"I see, that's not an unreasonable explanation... I understand, I forgive you."

It went so easy it was anticlimactic.

Was she like this because she was royalty? Or maybe it's her own personality?

"Where did you come from?"

The one who asked that was the frivolous boy, certainly, his name was Sashtal.

"I'm from the country as well, the west. Do you know where Lakesand is?"

"Sorry, I don't know... I grew up in Salaido."

"...Salaido."

Everyone standing in front of Imina paled hearing that word.

"Then you are..."

Apparently, over those four years Imina's home town had become quite famous. Come to think of it, the elves' invasion had started on that day.

"Yeah, I'm a survivor."

Imina smiled in self-mockery.

Even though they knew that Salaido was destroyed, they didn't see that tragedy with their own eyes. It was irritating and at the same time strange.

"Speaking of which, we haven't introduced ourselves yet. I'm Imina, she's Ellis. We both came from Salaido. We stopped here in middle of our journey, our destination is the great fortress."

"The great fortress? Are you going there as a mercenary?"

"That's right."

Sashtal nodded hearing response to the question.

"And this girl? She doesn't look like a warrior."

"She wants to be a nurse, despite how she looks she's good at wrapping bandages."

"Where were you before coming here?"

"The north. We secluded ourselves in the mountains to practice with the sword."

"Heh, that's quite old-fashioned. How far into the north? The elves' advanced considerably deep."

"The place we were in was beyond Mimora."

"Hmm I see. How'd it feel? The people who live in there, the air and such."

"We hadn't much exchanges with villagers, but they're living peacefully. It's quite far from the elves' influence because they advance in a different direction. Of course, I don't know what happened to them after our leave."

"I see I see. Then..."

This guy's tone of voice was really light. However, it felt like he tried to make Imina get carried away with it. In other words, he asked leading questions under the guise of small talk——in order to investigate about Imina and Ellis.

"You were called Sashtal, right?"

As he tried to continue, Imina interrupted him and asked.

"Is there a reason for investigating our identity in detail?"

"Woah."

Sashtal made a bitter smile and scratched his head. It was spot on.

"I was found out. Meh, you got me. What do we do? Milifica."

"...please don't openly swing it my way."

Milifica heaved a sigh, displeased.

"Really you, despite being good at sneaking things out, you give up too fast."

Although she made an impression of being formal and solemn, her making that kind of expression was a surprise to Imina. Maybe she was more at ease with someone she forgave from the heart.

"My apologies. We might need to examine the commotion students of our school have caused, but at the same time we have decided to examine your side as well."

"We didn't do anything. They have come at us on their own."

"I have heard so. However, in fact..."

"Hey hey, it's been revealed already so let me ask, what's your relationship with this girl?"

"Eh, me... eh? Ah, um, er."

Having gazes turned towards her Ellis was confused, and then,

"Sashtal, that's low! Really, what a person you are."

Milifica's voice had turned rough.

"It's just as the Prin... the Representative says. Do not lower the dignity of the Yusala drill school's representatives."

It was the other man who had a bitter expression, Vint.

Seeing these exchanges, Imina smiled unconsciously.

——It looked like they weren't bad guys.

Imina pat Ellis shoulder, whose face was red and had a confused expression,

"...she's my childhood friend. She's very timid, so don't tease her too much."

After he answered, Milifica looked into his eyes and nodded.

"Please forgive us for our repeated rudeness."

"No, I don't mind. We were acting rude as well. ...with that said, we're in the middle of a journey. We'd be grateful if you released us as soon as possible."

"About that..."

Unexpectedly, Milifica squinted.

"Actually, there are deliberations whether we should present the students of our school who have caused the outrages with charges. Therefore, we would like to trouble you for a little longer."

At the same time, the corners of her lips formed a thin smile——it was an act that was supposed to make it seem like she's troubled.

Imina had a feeling it would get cumbersome.

"The meaning behind their actions is questioned. In other words, whether 'they started a fight with an opponent they can't beat' or 'they were trying to harass weak people by using their numbers'... of course, both these acts are despicable. However, the charges and the punishment will be changed accordingly. The former would charge them with lack of knightly qualities, the latter would charge them with lack of gentlemanly qualities."

"...in other words?"

As expected, his premonition was right on target.

"*We shall ascertain your abilities*."

Milifica raised her hand and one of the men behind her——Vint, moved quietly.

He briskly moved in the front. Before Imina realized, he had prepared two wooden swords. Milifica received one of them and the other one was shoved in front of Imina.

"So that's it."

Imina heaved a sigh.

Although in theory it was plausible reason, in fact, this was *entertainment* of this princess.

A boy of the same age who had suddenly appeared in the town had beat the drill school's students. As representative she found interest in the boy and wants to check how strong is he ——that's what it meant.

"What if I say I refuse?"

She could no longer hide her smile.

"Your abilities and background will have to be examined. To be specific, you'll be questioned for much, much longer."

"In other words, the interrogation from earlier is going to get drawn-out, huh."

"Calling it 'interrogation' is a horrible accusation."

No one reacted to Sashtal's barefaced lie.

Imina scratched his head.

"...so their mean natures were similar too, huh."

"What will you do? If you don't decide soon, Vint will get tired."

"Tired? It seems like he'd be all right for at least an hour in this posture... well, I get it."

"Are we doing it here?"

"These are practice grounds after all."

In other words, she intended this from the beginning.

"Ellis, move in the back."

Ellis beside him raised her hands lightly and then they started moving in opposite directions. Milifica put on a thin smile and stood in front of Imina.

Looking at this was,

"Good grief, Princess is so playful."

Vint, who made a genuinely troubled expression and,

"I tried stopping her, but it can't be helped. Since it's already happening how about we bet on who's going to win?"

In contrast, Sashtal acted frivolously.

"Y-you must be joking! To propose gambling, even more so with the Princess as one of the targets..."

"Hey hey, it *is* a joke. Don't get so angry."

"Even if it's a joke, it's a poor one!"

"Vint, act as a referee."

Then, the bustle was silenced by authoritative voice.

"Y-yes."

Vint fixed his posture and stood between the two.

Imina lightly gripped the wooden sword. It was lighter and longer than the weapon he normally used.

——Well, it doesn't matter.

His and Milifica's line of sight met.

Involuntarily he opened his eyes wide. She had already finished her preparations for battle.

She took a stance holding the sword in both her hands and protruding it forward. Dignified and undisturbed, it looked like a model posture for swordsmanship. Her mind serene, she slowly raised the pointed sword. Imina understood she was a considerably skilful opponent.

"Hee."

Unconsciously, Imina's heart started beating faster.

He forgot this feeling a long time ago. In other words, it was a exhilaration of a match.

A match——sword to sword, pure game of skill. There was him and the opponent, two people who weren't enemies, it was something of which purpose wasn't killing.

However, he immediately drove away this emotion out of his head.

Because he no longer lived in that kind of world.

Hence, this too——this match, was *worthless*.

Stooping low with one leg in front and the other extended behind him, he poised his wooden sword naturally with one hand.

Vint gave a signal after seeing the two prepared.

"——Begin!"

At the same time Milifica's sword moved.

There wasn't a single opening, it could be called superb. It seemed like she could hit any part of his body in an instant. She must have trained swordsmanship from a young age.

He recalled what Lakshus told him once in the past. "You're skilled enough already, there should be no students of the same age as skilful as you are"——it was incredible flattery. Imina wondered if he could win against her if he enrolled four years ago.

Not moving an inch to close the distance between them, Milifica muttered a question.

"So you're not coming at me?"

With no answer, she swung the point of her sword just slightly.

"Then, I shall make my move."

Together with that sign——there was a flash.

She stepped in deeply closing the distance, raised her small sword and swung it downwards. All of it using minimum of gestures. With no wasteful preliminary movement she released a high-speed attack.

What she aimed at was his wooden sword. Her strike hit it from above, then without losing the momentum she slid the blade below his and flipped it up. All that in just an instant, there was no time to even blink.

Imina's weapon left his hand and danced in the air. On the other hand, Milifica's sword was pointed at his throat, unmoving.

After a second, the wooden sword that flew far away had rolled on the sand soundly.

"...match over!"

The referee raised one hand declaring Milifica's victory.

"Amazing, it's my loss."

Imina shrugged and raised his eyebrows.

It was a simple, sleek move. His hand that had the sword stolen from it wasn't even numb, which meant that rather than forcibly blown away, it was pulled out of his hand. A strike that didn't rely on strength at all.

"That was well done, as expected of the Representative."

Even as he complimented her, Milifica didn't move. She furrowed her eyebrows and glared at Imina.

It lasted for about five seconds.

"Um, Princess?"

Finally, when Vint spoke in puzzlement she exhaled loudly.

"...very well."

She finally pulled her sword backwards.

"You have my thanks for accompanying me in this bout. With this we can continue our deliberations."

After saluting Milifica spoke somewhat dissatisfied.

Well, it was natural since he was beat easily.

"That's great."

He replied politely, although it was a mystery what kind of deliberations this would help with.

"How long will you stay in this town?"

"About three days."

Compared to the original schedule he extended his stay by a day. They were caught in trouble and tired out, so he thought of replenishing their strength and doing preparations.

"Then, we shall pay for your stay. Please treat that as apology for the trouble."

"No, as expected that's..."

"No need to refrain. Let that be our reconciliation."

"Fine, I get it, thank you."

Imina nodded. Ellis who had imperceptibly come near him had lowered her head too.

Milifica showed a smile of appreciation to Imina and then to Ellis.

"If we finish our deliberations before you depart, I shall visit you."

We don't need it, Imina thought, but starting another exchange of words was cumbersome.

"I get it. Well, if you feel like it."

That's why just raised one hand and responded with a smile.

And then they have seen off the two travellers out of the school grounds.

Milifica Yusala Astozellen sat down in a chair after returning to executives' office and asked the two standing in front of the desk——Vint and Sashtal.

"What do you think?"

"By what, you mean?"

The one who responded with a question was Vint Culias.

He was the eldest son of Culias, an old Midgalz marquis household and Milifica's childhood friend. He was courteous and calm, also proficient with a sword. His loyalty to the royal family had caused him to be overprotective and overly friendly with Milifica, but he was a sincere boy.

"The match from earlier. I can't comprehend it anyhow."

"In my eyes, it was Princess' complete victory..."

Unable to discern her intentions, Vint tilted his head puzzled.

"Sashtal, what about you?"

"Me?"

Her other subordinate, Sashtal Dei made a dispirited expression and smiled.

In contrast to Vint, he was a commoner born in a rural area in the west. He was poor with etiquette, frivolous and composed, Sashtal was good at confusing others with words. On the other hand, since he was born in a hunters' household he was skilled in perceiving others' true nature and strength. He could see through lies and secrets of others.

"When I said I want to have a match with him you tried to stop me. 'It's better to give up' you said."

She thought that surely, he must be incredibly strong and it made her excited for the match instead. His warning had an opposite effect, she had to exchange blows with him by all means.

"However, the result was *like that*."

"Yup."

"Was your judgement mistaken?"

"No, I don't think so. Seeing you dissatisfied is good enough proof of that."

He was one of few people who could calmly speak to her without using honorifics. Vint didn't like that, but Milifica was pleased by the fact she wasn't given special treatment. Before being a Princess, on the school grounds she was the drill's student.

"What do you mean by that?"

She leaned slightly forward hearing his response.

"Before I voice my opinion, I would like to hear yours."

"Mine..."

About from earlier. The match with the boy who called himself Imina.

The match was finished in just a moment. It was her victory. Milifica's skill decided it brilliantly.

However,

"I felt a strange discomfort, but I don't know what was that. I wondered whether he held back or deliberately lost, but it didn't seem like that. It was as if..."

She searched for appropriate words for a moment,

"...he didn't feel like winning at all——that would the be closest description."

That's why she was dissatisfied.

Even after the declaration of her victory, she didn't pull the sword backwards.

"It was Princess' overwhelming victory!"

Vint interjected.

"He was defeated unable to react to Princess' swordsmanship, there's no doubt about it."

"Then, what is this discomfort I feel. It's first time feeling something like this. Also, Sashtal doesn't think it was my victory either."

Sashtal nodded as she looked at him questioningly.

"He wasn't really holding back. Just, he *didn't intend to win.*"

"Then, he lost on purpose?"

"It's slightly different from that."

He shook his head and shrugged.

"The match itself ended with your complete victory, Milifica. Whether the strike or rolling the sword upwards... the 'Thorn Bite' decided everything splendidly. Probably, considering pure skill you're above him."

"Then..."

"In a match, that is. In other words..."

With a smile.

Rather than with his usual frivolous attitude,

"If that wasn't a match, Milifica, it would be your loss. No... *you would be dead* ."

"Wha...!!"

With a bitter smile that felt like——awe.

"After receiving the 'Thorn Bite' his wooden sword fell out. In a match that's where it ends. But, if you were to kill each other, that is not so. That's where he would start his attack. He would close the distance even further and poke your eyes out with his bare hands or crush your throat."

These were words far outside the scope of Milifica's imagination.

The two couldn't say anything out of surprise.

"In my homeland there's something named 'Blackback'. When wounded it turns mad, a big bear that doesn't hibernate during winter. It's much nastier than some magical beast. After all, it's capable of discerning whether the strike that's about to hit it is fatal and if it isn't, it doesn't try avoiding it. Instead, it calmly strikes back. His presence... it feels just like that of the 'Blackback'. That's why surely, he employs that fighting style."

"Really, that's..."

Extremely irrational, she thought.

But on the other hand, the discomfort in the back of her head disappeared and she was able to think properly again.

Milifica didn't feel like she won. And that's because she indeed, did not win. It didn't mean he held back, it only meant he was disinterested in the match.

Even though he knew her 'Thorn Bite' was coming he didn't intend to avoid it at all, was it.

"Most likely, he's familiar with killing. He must have wielded a sword in actual battlefield or had an experience close to that. He's in a world beyond that of drill students."

Said Sashtal.

In his pupils and voice dwelled a warning for Milifica.

"That's why, it's better not to involve ourselves with him. You wanted to invite him to the drill school, right? He's the same age as we are and most likely just as skilled. But, he doesn't need it. There's nothing he can learn in here."

3

Caskes Kilishiaham and his comrades, the expulsion from the school was decided on that day for all nine.

There were more than enough charges for that. Starting with an assault on an innocent woman, through behaviour unworthy of drill school's students, usage of magical sword in the city, brandishing swords in a group against a single opponent——in addition to that, a number of

their previous criminal acts that were covered up before were brought up to light by an anonymous report. They could no longer excuse themselves anyhow.

The marquis household of Kilishiaham was very prestigious despite the short two hundred years' history as compared to the Empire's calendar, in their territory they were a family famous for supplying herbs and logistics during the war with southern barbarians. Therefore they had strong influence in the empire, Caskes used that authority to protect himself as he indulged in crime.

However, this drill school was supervised by the duke of Yusala household. Even Kilishiaham household couldn't compare to the family that had connections with the king. Also the tyrannies conducted by Caskes and others couldn't be covered up anyhow.

They were judged by the royal family, it was impossible to go against the decision. His father wouldn't help him. Rather, the third son was more like mud, a disgrace to the family, therefore cut ties with mercilessly.

Caskes relaxed himself far from his own territory and made a mistake of abusing authority he was born with. Surrounded by minor nobility flattering him, he misunderstood his own standing.

He got too carried away.

The students expulsed from the school would first contact their parents. Then, until either someone would pick them up or disinheritance would arrive, they would be imprisoned in the punishment room in the corner of the school campus.

Compared to the campus, the punishment room was inorganic and forlorn, merciless. No windows, small bath and hard, thin beddings. The door had a mechanism that only opened with key used from outside, they couldn't leave on their own anyhow. Therefore, it was something akin to a prison.

"...damn it!!"

Sitting on the bed, Caskes Kilishiaham spat out curses to no one. Although it was his first day in prison, he already did this dozens of times. Of course, no one counted them.

Why has it turned out like this——only anger and irrational feelings welled up inside him.

He didn't feel any guilt. He was unaware of the fact he did a bad thing. Although he was aware he violated the school regulations, he should have been allowed not to abide by them.

When Caskes named himself as Kilishiaham everyone had become afraid of him. There were only few people of higher standing than him in the entire empire, even more so in this town. Yusala drill town was a stopover supplying Great Astozellen fortress, Kilishiaham's herbs passed through this town. In other words, the merchants here would try getting closer to him.

"Damn itt..."

Just why do I have to through something like this, he wondered.

Entering drill school might have been a mistake in the first place. Because of his lack of talent for bussiness Kilishiaham household didn't expect anything from him and wasn't as generous as

to allow him to free-load on them. That's why he thought of becoming a knight since young age. He could uphold marquis' households honour as a royal knight. Yeah, he remembers it. When he entered he was full of hope. He received the classes seriously and was training desperately ——since when was it, that this happened. He noticed that the name of Kilishiaham that was a burden to him in the house was very convenient to use outside. Everyone served him readily. Since when was it that accustomed himself that his selfishness would pass.

Even despite thinking about that, Caskes didn't feel any remorse.

In that sense, he was foolish. He understood nothing. Even though everyone made a good expression to him, he was hated on the campus. More prideful people had laughed at him from the shade, the ones fawning over him were just mercenaries hired with his gold.

"Damn, damn damn, this...!"

He hit the bed with all his strength.

His henchmen who were arrested together with him were imprisoned in a separate room. He wondered what were they doing. In the end, they were just minor nobility. They didn't have to worry about their household's name, even despite expulsion from school they probably won't be thrown out by their parents.

But Caskes was different. Even if he went back home, it was no place for him——.

Hearing knocking on the door, Caskes raised his head.

He looked at the clock on the wall. It was nine in the evening. Barely two hours passed since dinner. Most likely he wasn't disinherited from his household in such a short time.

Frightened, he raised a voice of frustration.

"I can't open this anyway, do whatever you want!"

After a sound of the key being turned in the lock, the door slowly opened.

Peeking inside was the face of instructor Shishilii.

"Not very calm are you, Caskes Kilishiaham."

Apparently he, with his wry smile, was on duty today.

Originally, he was in charge of history lessons. He was a thin man in the middle of his forties who had pleasant features. He had a calm personality but lacked dignity and was looked down upon by the students. Normally they made fun of him by saying "Glasses' lessons are only good for sleeping".

Of course, Caskes was no exception.

"Ha, I'm no longer a student here, honorifics are unneeded, right."

Certainly, this guy was a viscount. It was a different position from that of a marquis.

However, Shishilii ignored Caskes insult.

"Here's a gift for you. Of course, it's not from me."

He put down the tray he held with both of his hands on the ground.

On it, there was a drink in a glass and a small cake. The drink was something like a wine. The cake looked cheap, like something commoners would eat.

Not happy at all getting this, he asked.

"Who is this from."

"This just means even someone like you has somebody worrying about you."

"...ah?"

He got a sarcastic answer. Involuntarily, he let out a low voice.

But,

"In any case, it can't be helped if you don't eat it."

Suddenly, Shishilii——had smiled somewhat meaningfully, Caskes was confused by the intimidation. It was something the instructor never showed before. Despite undergoing his lectures for three years since admission, he didn't see it a single time. Did this guy really smile like this.

With a broad smile stuck to his thin face the instructor said this.

"It's quite a high-grade cake. Especially. *The cream is. Exquisite.*"

He made pauses as he spoke, as if he didn't care about anything,

"Tomorrow morning I'll come to get dishes. Listen, *you are not to leave a single bit.*"

Unnaturally emphasized.

While Caskes was in shock, the instructor turned around on his heel with a twirl.

The door was closed, locked, and silence had dominated the punishment room again.

Caskes furrowed his eyebrows, but then suddenly he walked up to the table. He stared at the "gift" on top of the tray and grasped a fork next to it to split it crudely. As expected, a frugal butter cake for commoners had no cream inside it.

Instead, there was a piece of paper inside.

It was a short note.

Written on it was "I'll save you tomorrow, so just wait".

"...hee."

His lips distorted involuntarily.

Save you, what did that mean specifically. It's probably not about escaping from this place. Even if if he escapes from the drill school and lives as a commoner, his situation as someone disinherited by his household wouldn't change. The one who wrote this probably knows that.

In that case, it must probably be overturning the expulsion, or possibly something else entirely ——possibly, a large confusion because of which Caskes' case will be forgotten.

"Ku-kuku, hahaha."

However, it did sound interesting.

It seemed like someone was up to raising a fuss. Moreover, they even had an instructor involved. It meant that their plot was sink or swim, a good opportunity for Caskes.

Indeed——it was a much better prospect than his current one.

He placed the piece of paper in his mouth and washed it down with wine. He then stuffed himself with the cake to get rid of the discomfort after eating foreign matter and chewed strongly.

The wine and the cake had a harsh, astringent taste, speaking clearly - they were distasteful. Must have been something to taste of poor commoners. It didn't fit an aristocratic tongue.

However, he was ordered not to leave any. All evidence has to be erased. If some of the ink was left on the sponge, it might be found out what was written on the note.

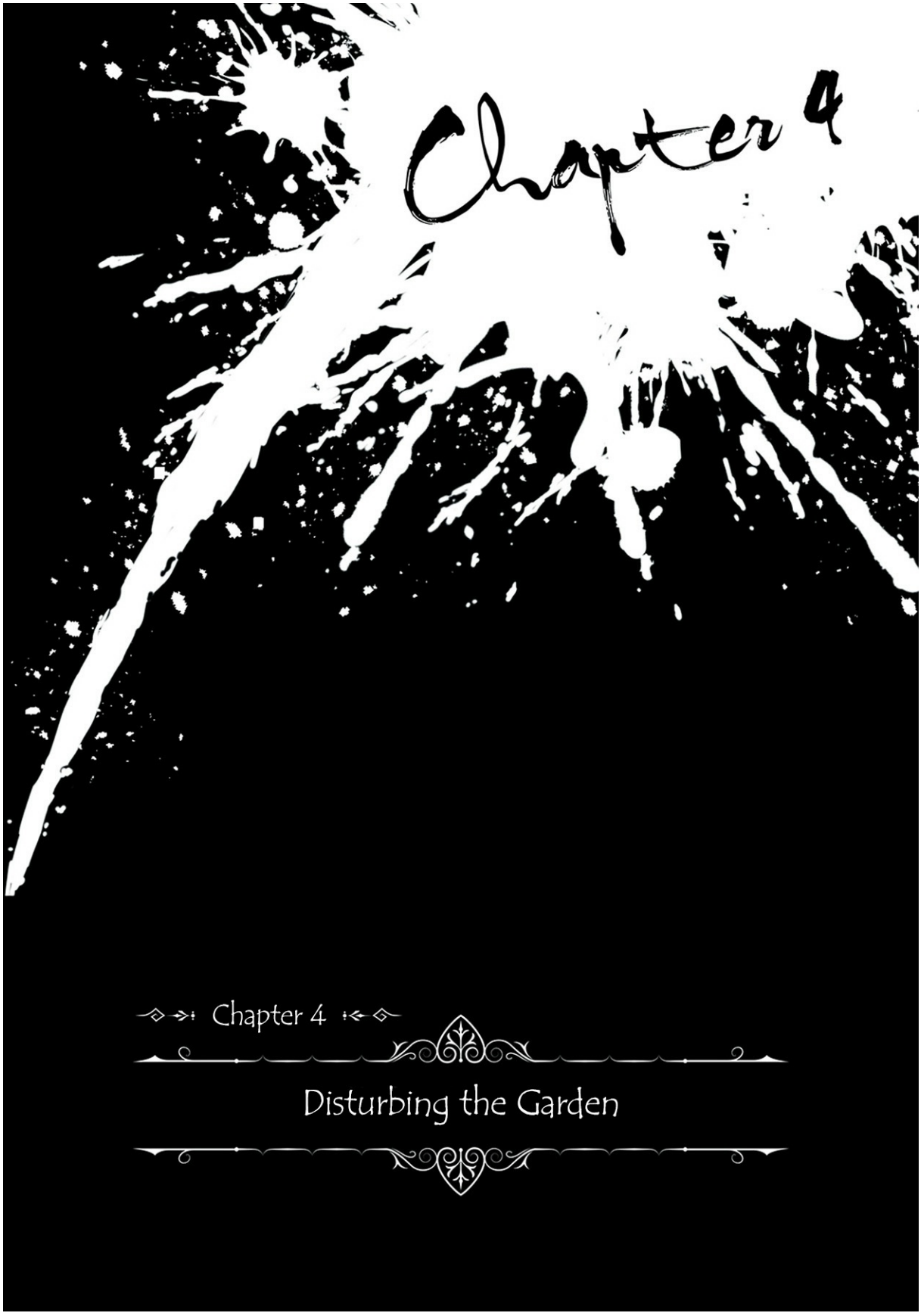
Caskes ate the distasteful gift clean and laughed.

By now, probably the same thing was delivered to his henchmen. Though he was worried if those fools will realize the meaning of this "gift".

Thinking that, he threw himself onto the bed.

Still feeling acrid taste in the back of his throat, he closed his eyes and breathed in deeply.

He didn't wish for the next day not to come. Rather, after the night is over and morning comes ——*that* will begin, he couldn't help but look forward to it.



1

By dawn, Imina and Ellis have become the subject of the town's talks.

When they exited to the main street for breakfast, the school's students stared at them intently. Whenever they passed by them and met their gazes, they would look away. Whispers could be heard from afar. Imina was irritated by that and Ellis had uncomfortably tried to suppress the sides of her head hidden by her hair.

Although he felt they should rather go back to the inn, but the only open stalls were those for students in the town's main street and the guests apparently should get their meals in there. Since it couldn't be helped they went to purchase a light meal. Tea and bread, as well as boiled vegetables. When they sat down on a wooden chairs side by side at the store's front, even more gazes of students have gathered on them.

"...what a hassle."

Ellis sitting next to him smiled wryly.

"Did we do something strange?"

Yesterday, they indeed caused some trouble together with drill students, but was that a reason to attract this much attention?

"We aren't being glared at... are we?"

"I don't think we are."

He shook his head in response to the question she asked, uneasy.

There was no malice nor hostility in the gazes.

It seemed like pure interest——and strangely, it felt positive.

"...well, whatever."

They were leaving the town in a few days, he wasn't really interested in it.

He bit the bread. It was freshly baked, but somehow bland.

"Yesterday, we missed the chance to buy nuts, have we."

"Yes... even though I wanted to bake some bread after a long time..."

"Let's go buy some ingredients later. We'll eat in the inn at noon."

"Really?!"

Ellis' expression turned cheerful.

"Um, you see, I... I want to make a soup! One with a ox's tail!"

"I wonder if they sell those. There are only stalls here, I wonder where the market is."

"Also, garnish with herbs and potatoes!"

"Got it. I leave everything to you."

Excited, Ellis leaned forward, her chest turning warm.

When they were secluded in the mountains they didn't find too many ingredients. Of course, there were other things to enjoy that you couldn't find in the city, but from time to time she had made a sad expression.

A lot happened so I want to make some of Auntie's cooking, she said.

Ellis had learned Lilu's cooking and was influenced by her. All those four years she did that. In particular the sweet bread with walnuts kneaded in——his mother's, Lilu's speciality.

From time to time she would speak to herself.

——I want Imina to eat that bread forever.

——In Auntie's stead, I'll make it——.

Actually, Ellis was good at devising her own cooking too. Even if she doesn't force herself to reproduce Lilu's cooking, she herself had a good taste. But he couldn't tell her that yet.

That was because of the embarrassment and because he clearly yearned for memories of his family.

Instead, he reached out and strongly stroked her head.

"W-what happened? This is sudden."

"No, it's nothing."

The only one left together with Imina was this girl.

Betrayed by his best friend, his family killed, his home village buried by the forest——only Ellis remained by his side. She was concerned with Imina. Ellis discarded away the village of elves that was her birthplace, she discarded Endveils who were her family and snuggled up to Imina.

Not only she discarded everything, but also *she gave him everything at the same time.*

That's why Imina felt it was tragic and loved her dearly. Even if she was an elf, who are the enemies——no, precisely it was because she was an elf, yet she sided with him despite that.

"This tea is quite dull."

Since she looked inquisitive, he let go of her and changed the topic.

"Yes, I think it was brewed for a really short time. Probably because of the large amount of customers."

Ellis peeked into the cup and nodded.

Apparently, on the other side of the main street there was a dormitory for the students and they

passed through this place to get to the campus at the top of the hill. On their way the students frequent café's and stalls for light meals. Since there wasn't much time for customers to stay, everyone hurried and this is how it turned in the end.

He thought and,

"Tea doesn't sell well in the morning. Especially that the nobles drink luxurious one in their own quarters. That's why the ones who order this are commoners like us, it's better for us that it's weak and cheap."

Abruptly, a single student——had entered their conversation.

Standing in front of the table, the student smiled to the two.

"Hi. Thanks for yesterday."

It was an easygoing, soft-haired boy.

Yesterday, he was one of the two together with that princess.

Certainly, his name was,

"Sashtal, was it?"

"Yeah. You remembered."

"H-hey, Sashtal! What are you doing, suddenly calling out to them..."

Rushing from behind him was a big man.

Age-wise he was about eighteen or nineteen. He might have looked that old only because of his large body size and in fact be younger than that. He had a common, rugged face and was visibly panicking.

"Well, isn't this fine. It's rude to stare at someone from the distance."

He was mismatched with small-bodied Sashtal who had nerves of steel.

"That might be so but... no, sorry, it was rude. I'm Fream, this guy's classmate."

"Imina. And this is Ellis."

Imina responded to the courtesy introducing them.

"Once again, nice to meet you."

However, honestly speaking Imina was glad they came to talk. He didn't have to hold back and could ask them whatever he wanted.

"By the way, is *this' happening'... because I took down one of you?"*

In presence of everyone he lightly pointed at the people staring,

"Ahh, I guess so."

Sashtal chuckled, nodded——and then,

"Still, don't misunderstand, they aren't interested in a bad way."

He raised his hand and shook in the air.

Fream took over the explanation.

"The guy who caused you trouble... rather, the guy who started a quarrel with this miss here is hated on the entire campus. Using the name of marquis house Kilishiaham he did these kind of things all the time. He pissed off everyone, but no one could openly go against him."

"I see."

Well, in short, everyone was pleased that Imina had beat the hated rich guy who abused his money, was it.

Honestly, he hardly remembered anything about this man called Caskes. Imina couldn't care less about him. He only stunned the guy because he was being troublesome. Of course, if by chance were he to harm Ellis in any way, he would definitely start caring.

"Meh, my apologies. It's something we should have done. Normally, one of us, the Yusala students should have went and stopped him."

Fream said that with an apology,

"I don't mind."

But Imina just shrugged.

It wasn't like he did that for their sakes in the first place. Since that guy had picked a fight, Imina did it for their own convenience.

Also, *Ellis wasn't as weak as to let such a fellow take her anywhere*——.

"By the way, Imina."

Sashtal called out to him.

"What is it?"

Imina involuntarily turned vigilant.

"I wanted to ask, are you a mercenary?"

Sure enough, that was the question.

It was so straightforward that he smiled bitterly.

——Even though he asked leading questions in a roundabout manner yesterday, today he's unreserved, huh.

Bewildered by Imina's smile, Fream rebuked Sashtal.

"Hey, that's rude."

"Well, isn't it fine. Our Princess is interested in your strength... in fact, that blow you defeated Caskes with was superb."

——So he was there.

Well, who cares. Imina wasn't interested in it, so he brushed it off lightly.

"That's nothing big, a simple surprise attack."

"Ohh, speaking of which."

Then, Fream clapped his hands as if he remembered something.

"Speaking of the Representative, you, why did you do..."

He must have wanted to inquire about what led to that slap.

However, the question was,

"What about me?"

Interrupted by another voice that sounded from behind Imina.

"R-Representative?!"

"Oh, speak of the devil."

Fream faltered, Sashtal just shrugged.

Imina tilted his head puzzled and then looked behind to find a blonde girl with a light smile. She was very similar to his older sister——Uruha, but her expression had more of a noble atmosphere.

"Heya, Princess."

When greeted with a raised eyebrow, Milifica Yusala Astozellen made a bitter expression.

"Would you please stop with 'princess'? In here, I am one of the drill students myself."

"I'm not really a student here though. Normal citizens should pay respect to the princess."

"It didn't seem too respectful for my taste."

She made an appalled expression. However, she seemed to have fun somewhat. Her cheeks slightly relaxed.

"That henchman of yours... the one called Vint, he's not here is he. The other one had called out to me though."

"...really, what are you doing, Sashtal."

Astounded, Milifica heaved a sigh and,

"I came across them by chance so I came to say hi."

The frivolously smiling Sashtal.

She frowned and then looked back at Imina.

"In the first place, he isn't my henchman but an executive officer."

——In that case, I wonder if those girls behind you are your henchmen.

About five or six female students.

They peeked out from behind her with interest.

Imina's gaze must have been noticed as Milifica explained before he could ask.

"They're my friends from the same grade and class."

"I see."

Female soldiers were not uncommon in Midgalz. Particularly, there were many women among the medics or involved in logistics——there were also ones involved in things like cooking and distribution. Although a small percentage of the whole, there were also those who stood on the frontlines armed with swords, there were also theories that female commanders increased morale of the army. This princess was exactly that. One day she'll probably become a general leading army.

Mostly, it is said that the royal family is very heroic and courageous.

Milifica's gaze then moved to Ellis.

"Good morning, how was the inn?"

"Ah, that's... good morning! Thank you, I slept well."

Suddenly being spoken to Ellis panicked, lower her head and blushed.

"Were meals to your taste?"

"Yes, they were delicious."

"Can I sit beside you? I have an interest in your person."

"Ah, ee? Y-yes..."

For some reason, it seems she took interest in Ellis.

"Yesterday we didn't have an opportunity to talk. ...no, even now we can't afford acting laid-back because of morning lectures either."

"Ah, umm, that's..."

Ellis started blundering.

It must've been either because she was spitting image of Uruha, or because she was from royal family.

With that said though, Ellis was also a princess, but mentioning that would be needless. Of course, they were absolutely unable to reveal their identities.

Confused, she looked at Imina who had responded with a nod.

"The princess wants to talk with you personally, try not to blunder."

It was just a detour on the way to school, at most it'll last for ten minutes. If there are any questions that pry too deeply he can always interrupt them. Also, he thought it was a good opportunity. Ellis was very reluctant to talk with other people because she was afraid of them finding out she was an elf. But to Imina——watching her fearful of it and timid was a little bit painful.

Real Ellis was a bright, cheerful girl who laughed very often.

"Were you travelling this entire time, just the two of you?"

"Yes."

"It must have been tough."

"No, um... nothing like that. Because Imina always protects me."

As Imina listened to the two's conversation, unexpectedly his shoulder was tapped from behind.

When he turned around, Milifica's classmates——the girls stared at him with great interest.

"What is it?"

With a sparkle in her eyes one of the girls asked bluntly.

"Heyhey, you, are you that girl's lover?"

"...ha?"

At the same time, all others girls started talking coquettishly.

"Kyaa, you're immediately asking that?!"

"I mean, don't you all want to know?"

"Certainly but..."

"So, how is it?"

"Hey, girls, don't raise such loud voices, it's unbecoming."

"Oh, how prim. But aren't you interested too?"

"I-I'm not..."

"Lucky guess it is, you're red up to your ears."

"Ahaha, how cutee!"

The girls let out shrill laughter, Imina involuntarily frowned.

He was taken aback deep within. What on earth is this. It's way too noisy.

It was a first sight for Imina who grew up in the countryside that had few children of the same age, he was honestly bewildered. Uruha spoke flippant things and when they were alone, Ellis too was quite talkative but——compared to that, to think having this many people would be this noisy.

Moreover, despite a very common topic their attitude was awfully elegant, causing him to feel discomfort as if someone poured water on him.

"You girls, cease that. Aren't you troubling him."

Unable to let this go unnoticed and coming to his help was Milifica. Everyone made an embarrassed expression and apologized, though there didn't seem to be a single speck of reflection on their actions.

"Heyhey, you, Ellis-san was it. How old are you?"

Their target had suddenly changed from Imina to Ellis.

"Eh? Um, that's... eighteen."

"Well, same age as lady Milifica."

"You're very beautiful. Your skin is white and your hair has a wonderful colour. I'm envious."

"Right, she's so pretty. Just like an elf."

Just like an elf, with these words Ellis' lips stiffened. Her gaze was drawn and clung to Imina. But, that lasted only for a moment.

"It would be better not to use that compliment."

Milifica strictly admonished her classmates.

"Although it's an old compliment, we're currently at war with the elves."

Of course, that wasn't because she knew Ellis isn't a human. During yesterday's conversation ——she has memorized the fact that they have come from Salaido. Probably she was being considerate, thinking that comparing her to elves who have destroyed their village would be unpleasant.

"You're right... it was thoughtless of me. I'm sorry, Ellis-san."

"N-no, it's nothing."

"But, you really are beautiful."

"Right? I ended up getting charmed by her beauty."

Once again, this place had become noisy and lively.

"...good grief, this place ended up really cheerful."

Fream stood up from beside Imina, who was excluded from the conversation.

Imina was put on the sidelines by the impetus of the women.

"Well, you can't help that. See, they wanted to learn more from that lady, rather than from a man."

And then next, Sashtal continued.

Pointing at Milifica, he smiled.

"Our Princess is quite popular."

"Looks like it."

She certainly had quite a lot believers. Dignified, as well endowed with both appearance and behaviour, her sword arm was also first class. On top of that, she was a daughter of royal family. If its for her sake, there definitely will be a lot of men and women who will threw their lives away. In case she stands on the battlefield, she'll definitely be a good commander.

"Speaking of which, I forgot to ask earlier because of the commotion but... you, are you really making a living as a mercenary?"

"No, it's not as to earn a living."

Imina shook his head in response to Fream's question.

"I was a volunteer on my way to Astozellen."

Astozellen great fortress.

At the feet of the Mi-Nou mountains towering over this place, about two hundred kilometres away——a great fortress was built facing Mi-Rea plains, it was a huge military base as large as an entire city.

It was important enough to be named with royal family's surname, the first line of defence of human race. In case it falls, the front will move further another four hundred kilometres until Fobiniolmus Cliff's castle.

At Astozellen, the battles of the army and the elves have continued back and forth for almost half a year now. The army is always understaffed so as long as there are applicants, they will be stationed to some troop.

"Hmm... do you have any experience with battles?"

"Several small ones. Nothing big as of yet."

It seemed like Imina relaxed unintentionally.

Unaware of it himself, he answered honestly.

"And combat with elves?"

"Hmm. Among elves, there are some who don't concern themselves with big battles and tend to play around by assaulting villages. I fought those, something like bandit extermination."

He subjugated magical beasts and demons, helping settlements and people like that.

"Where did you learn swordsmanship?"

"Half of it was self-learned, the other half I learned from a retired female swordsman who lived in the mountains."

Imina had no idea whether what he learned from that woman can be called "swordsmanship", but in any case, she was extremely strong.

"Huh, I see."

Deeply impressed, Fream looked downwards and stroked his own chin.

"Honestly, I admire soldiers who work their way up to glory like you. I want to polish my skill with a sword and stand as a proud patriot. I dreamed of becoming a warrior since I was a child."

In response, Imina could only nod.

That was because he himself, had the same dream once.

However, what Fream said next had caused something to stir in his heart.

"Although I dreamed of becoming a soldier and entered the drill school to protect the country, honestly speaking, I was only reminded of what you call 'reality'. It's all noble folks who do it for prestige, we commoners are being looked at arrogantly by them when we're practising our sword skills. At least, I'd like to improve my swordsmanship, but those nobles are strong.

Whether they're gifted or because they did it since kids, no matter how much I try I can't win against them who have more experience."

"I see."

Becoming aware of the stir in his heart, he agreed with Fream.

"I'll graduate in less than two years. Sashtal too, as well as that representative lady there... we're all in the same grade. But, I've no idea how many of them are going to go to the battlefield. Those with superior results can become members of Royal Knights and get prestigious work in the imperial city. All the nobles care about is having a comfortable retirement free from care or becoming a general of the private armies of their family or relatives. In the end, very few seriously intend to fight."

And that, exactly that *stir*——was something that he felt in the back of his head ever since he arrived at this town.

Why are they acting so care-freely in here, he wondered.

It was wartime. The Great Astozellen Fortress that was the frontline was just a little bit further ahead, elves and the army are in the middle of killing each other. This was the drill city that's fostering future soldiers, they're candidates for officers who will bear the country's future.

And yet, the city's air was like peace itself, the students also seemed to feel the same. Not even slight urgency could be felt. Although everyone was most likely highly skilled with their magical swords, it made Imina wonder if they even understand what real combat is.

Looking at the situation of the war, the human side was extremely disadvantageous. It's been four years since aggression on Salaido, the Midgalz Empire had lost approximately twenty percent fo the country, there way no way as of now to recover the lost territory. At this rate what awaits humanity is steady destruction. And yet, it's like this.

They lacked sense of crisis——overwhelmingly so.

After all, for most, the battlefield was *so far*.

Although it was the country's territory, what was taken away from it was just the frontier, only a small area with a relatively low population. Since the elves are remaking the humans as demons and turn the lands into the forests, the rate of survival is very small. There was almost no chance to hear the voices of those burned out and therefore, the refugees didn't flow into the cities in large quantities.

The major cities responsible for the industry were unharmed. Not just that, there was a boom, special demands because of the war, people were living a safe and excessive lives in safe areas.

But if Astozellen was to fall, everyone will fall into distress all at once.

If the elves reach past the Mi-Nou mountains, there's a four hundred kilometres of mostly plains up until the Fobiniolmus Cliff's Castle. Without geographical advantage to stop them, there were hardly any big rivers on the continent——and very few lakes.

The Nahata plains that are the major producing area for wheat, Viligiana that was famous for horse training as well as College Town Elinamie. If those are lost there will be a major impact to the national economy. The price of wheat will soar, the transport and communication costs will be higher because of lack of horses and the academy research will grow stagnant. The impact of the aftermath will spread to all industries.

Surely, they don't realize that it might happen in the *the future as near as tomorrow*. Most likely, it wasn't just the students of this drill school, but also the majority of the country's population.

After all, they have never seen it.

How do those damned elves kill people, how people are killed.

How do they destroy human villages.

How do they turn the human land into part of the fairy kingdom——.

"By the way, Imina."

After Fream finished speaking, his line of sight had returned to Imina.

To him, Imina must have been an existence to admire.

He thought that becoming a soldier by raising one's skill was splendid.

That fighting for the country was something to be proud of.

That he was a soldier he has dreamed of since young.

How ironic.

Certainly, Imina too dreamed of that in the past. Becoming a soldier serving the country, protecting the homeland. But now, he himself——*was not a person Fream should be looking up to.*

And then Fream asked.

Strangely enough, it was a fundamental question for Imina.

"You, why do you want to become a soldier?"

Involuntarily, the ends of Imina's lips distorted.

Fream's expression changed.

The respect and familiarity on it had turned into puzzlement——and then to fear.

Not conscious of the smile he made, Imina answered.

"For revenge."

In the end, it was just that.

To me, that's all there is.

"I just want to pierce the filthy elves' hearts with my sword."

2

It was nearly noon.

In the morning, the lectures were carried out in the drill school. In the surroundings there were signs of several people, shouts and sword clashes could be heard in the distance were accompanied by silence.

Caskes Kilishiaham was alone, detached from all that.

He could even feel the breathing of the students in the punishment rooms in the corner of the school building. If he felt like it, he could exchange words with his henchmen that were in arrest in the adjacent room.

However, Caskes couldn't afford to turn his attention to the outside world.

Far from that.

Since when was it that he started noticing the abnormalities in his body. Last night he was completely healthy. When he woke up in the morning and ate the tasteless breakfast there was nothing wrong either. When he noticed, he felt spaced out, his limbs were numb, his body feverish and chills wouldn't stop. When he realized his own condition, he ended up only being able to be conscious of his own pain.

His head felt heavy and he had a terrible headache, as if his head was being torn to pieces. Past numbness, his limbs started to feel tingle as if stabbed with needless. Along with rapid heartbeat, nausea spread from his abdomen to his entire body. Caskes had never experienced such symptoms up until now.

At first he cried out. He felt very bad and there was no one there, it felt painful. He called for help however he could. But even as he hit the door and complained, the only voices he could hear were those of his henchmen behind the wall. Call a doctor, I feel really bad too——they said. And so, Caskes learned he wasn't the only one whose condition turned poor.

He considered mass food poisoning. Or maybe, someone who had a grudge on them had dosed food with something. And there, with that thinking, he suddenly has become aware. Speaking of which, the gift cake and wine from last night, wasn't its taste really harsh and had left an odd after-taste.

Caskes thought it was because they were cheap. That commoners ate products of such low quality.

But, if that wasn't the case.

"!!...khh...aaAAAAaaaAa!!"

Sitting on the bed he held his belly and yelled in order to distract himself from the pain. He

wondered what was happening to his bad friends who were trapped on his both sides. He long lost the allowance to pick up the sounds from the outside world.

Why wouldn't anyone come. Was he already an existence the drill school had given up on. Or maybe, he was poisoned after all. In that case, who rigged it. There must be some people who instructed those. Damn it. He had no idea who was it, but he'll never forgive them. In order to held down his anguish he desperately focused on resentment.

He crouched and moaned, not noticing the sound of the key opening the door.

However, as expected——he did know who entered the door.

"...so, how do you feel today."

Caskes turned his gaze towards the owner of the voice. He saw the loathsome face.

"Shishirii, you bas...tard..."

With the same expression he had when he brought in gift last night, smiling gently.

What did this thin glasses guy do to me?

He wanted to ask, but voice wouldn't come out. Instead, a growl like that of a beast has leaked.

Instructor Shishirii put his hand on his bony chin, leaned his thin torso slightly to the side and spoke in similar tone as when he did when looking at the map during the history lectures.

"Hmm... not bad."

Not bad, he said? Where is he even looking to spit something like that out.

"Feels slightly insecure because of the slow reaction time, but there's a passing grade."

"Aa.. woo... aguu..."

What the hell am I saying.

"A Corpse Seed of Origin. That's the *thing* you are now."

"Ihhyuu?"

Seed of.. what? He said something Caskes couldn't understand.

"First, we plant a seed. When it sprouts from a body, it scatters spirit energy stored away in the embryo and the host's organism is subjected to organic necromancy. Under normal circumstances it happens after a few dozens of minutes after planting, but this time I tried adjusting the trigger time shifting it by half a day as part of experiment."

"Aee? Ueeu?"

Seed? Planting?

"The conscious... your ego is still remaining isn't it. I can't tell any longer from your appearance

though."

"I-iii? Iiaa? A-a..ai,"

Conscious? Ego? I said, what are you...

"Instructor, since when have you become this talkative?"

A single human shape had appeared. From behind thin glasses.

"Oaa, ee, haa——"

It was Caskes' acquaintance.

They hardly ever spoke. That person was quite nasty after all. One year below Caskes in school, having excellent performance, good personality and very good appearance as a bonus. That person had popularity Caskes lacked, and above all, Caskes was one of the very few the figure spoke with as its real self——.

The figure identified itself with Caskes enough to speak honestly——wait, what did "identified" mean again.

It felt like he was forgetting something important.

His own roots, his own pride, something important.

"This is regrettable. As a scholar, it really pains me."

"Kuku... *Instructor* should have been a history teacher."

"Ohh, you're right. But, evocation is also splendid science. Let's leave it at that. Rather than silly long years of *human history* stacked up... mysterious and unknown crystallization of *elven organic necromancy*, is much more interesting."

"Is that so. Honestly speaking, for me, a human, it's something extremely dreadful."

"No, certainly it's as you say, it is dreadful. I wonder how does he feel like as of now."

What are those two saying for a while now?

Feels? I'm feeling what?

It's obviously great. My body is hot, I overflow with strength and I feel comfortable inside my head, ohh——I feel hungry. I want to eat something.

I want, to eat meat.

"Meh, it'll get dangerous soon."

Shishirii gave a single command and stepped backwards.

If you look leisurely for too long, you'll be eaten.

"How are the other punishment rooms?"

"Same as *this*, they should be complete by now."

"I see, well then, I'll go around unlocking them.."

"Please do. Still... it's quite sudden. Two months earlier than planned."

"Haha."

The figure laughed. With what was perhaps an expression that was never shown anyone, face distorted with cruelty.

And, it continued.

"It's a godsend. When I wondered what to do, such an opportunity had come and they were conveniently caught. Also, I was in the right mood."

"*I felt like breaking something*, is what it means."

"In short, a whim huh. ...well, I promised to match your timing by providing a method, so I won't complain. As long as I'm able to poke a hole in that large fortress it's fine by me. Still, it was fun, *pretending to be human* that is."

"It's a great help to hear that. With that said, I feel like it's about time to *stop pretending*."

"Yeah, you're right."

Instructor Shishirii——the man recognized by that name in the Yusala drill school until now had suddenly changed his tone of voice. From what was a polite tone, it changed into one arrogant and intimidating.

And next, he sighed deeply.

Something strange happened and his appearance started changing.

His bony cheeks were puffed out, his skin had become more moist, his limbs invigorated, his appearance was rejuvenated to that of a fifteen year old. His hair grew all at once and from white and ultramarine, it changed into silver.

And, *both of his ears have turned pointed, like needles.*

"Good grief, this is a sight I can't believe no matter how many times I see it."

The figure heaved a sigh of astonishment and awe.

The one who used to be Shishirii nodded proudly.

"Hmph, even among the same tribe there's no other who can change themselves and adapt as well as I do. Therefore, my evocation flourishes in glory along with my name. ...it's named 'Differ and Howl'."

In the end, his voice too, had turned into that of a youth in his mid-twenties.

"I'm filled with awe, instructor. No, isn't it about time I call you with the real name."

"I don't mind either way."

That *elf* laughed generously.

"Although, I don't think there's anyone who would call me Shishirii like this."

"That's true. Then... let's begin, my Lord Kuzan Endveil."

The figure smiled, after revising the name, they left the room.

"Nine Corpse Seeds to start with. It'll increase from now on. Neither this town, nor anything in the half-a-day's distance will last."

He muttered cynically,

"Ha, this small city isn't enough for me. However... this is for the clan and the Khan's sakes. It's what you call working in the shadows."

Then Kuzan stared into the distance somewhere.

The figure and the elf started walking together.

Behind them, what used to be Caskes Kilishiaham dived into the door with impetus.

"Oo... aa.. AA, OOOAA."

There was no longer any of the former him——the hooligan who boasted of being born in Marquis' household.

He was over two metres tall.

His skin was black as if he was dirty with mud and stiff like rock, muscles all over his body were abnormally developed.

Both his eyes sharp and slanted, his mouth looking like a big tear in his face, long fangs among serrated teeth. A mane covering him from his head to back, like a spiked wire.

What stood there, was a wicked demon.

A fierce and violent species called "Ogre".

Possibly, his nature as a human was what allowed him to become an ogre.

The Ogre growled loudly.

His former henchmen have come out of the punishment rooms together.

Three Ogres and five Trolls. Adding Caskes, there were nine of them.

They relied on the barely remaining memory of their human selves that was inside them, glared all over with uncontrollable appetite and lust before making their way to the students——no—

to the classroom the *food* was in.

Milifica Yusala Astozellen thought of herself as of miserable for not being able to do her best during the lectures.

After a several dozens of minutes, lunch break would begin.

Military Research should have been one of her favourite lectures, but just today the instructor's words entered her ear and immediately left with the other.

No, actually it wasn't "just today". She couldn't sleep well last night either or concentrate on her assignments. When she returned to the student dormitory and restless, responded with half-hearted replies, she worried Vint and Sashtal.

She knew the reason for that. It was the two travellers she met by chance yesterday.

Especially the boy——Imina.

When she headed towards the main street after hearing students talk about a commotion, in the middle of it he suddenly grasped her both cheeks with his hand in a rude manner. For the time being she brought him to the campus to hear the entire story, but she also thought of confirming his ability that allowed him to take down Caskes with a single blow, causing her mischief to wake up. Using an excuse she had a match with him which resulted in her complete victory. However, it was suspicious. After they left Sashtal said that he had no intention of fighting right from the beginning.

Interest had sprung inside of her. At the same time, she realized her mood had turned restless.

In the morning, she saw him and wanted to call out, but for some reason rather than to the boy ——she only spoke with the girl, Ellis. It was strangely difficult for her to talk with Imina.

Why was it, she wondered.

Was it anger for holding back during competition? Or maybe anticipation, wanting to see him serious? Certainly, she was craving for a good opponent. There were no longer any drill students on the campus who could defeat Milifica in swordsmanship. She was strong enough to take down the lecturers.

It might also be thirst for knowledge that has welled up in her, to know about his mysterious atmosphere. His birthplace was Salaido. Four years ago, it was the first village to be invaded by the elves. She was also curious about his dead elder sister he said was similar to her. To have forgotten himself and did such a thing after seeing her face, Milifica and his sister must have been like two peas in a pod.

Speaking of which——it was the first time in her life for a man to touch her skin.

Since Milifica came from royal family, she did receive a kiss on the back of her hand before. As for dancing——she was bad at it but——at that time she held hands with a man. Also during the matches when practising with a sword among a group of other students. However, that kind of thing didn't fall into the category of "touching the skin".

Touching the skin, is *that kind* of thing.

Even though she knew the circumstances, she felt irritated recalling it. At the same time, her cheeks turned hot with shame and somehow, she was unable to stop fidgeting.

He was the kind of man she never met before.

Milifica was born and raised as royalty, she was always respected and feared by others. There were those who flattered her to improve her mood, those who refrained and maintained their distance and those who showed excessive delight at her every movement——she was raised to live a life where that was natural.

Living as part of the royal family was stifling, so when she went to the drill school she decided to come in contact with others as a drill student herself. As a result, her life had somehow improved but not much has yet changed in its essence. Somehow she was pushed up to the position of representative and had served as the city's representative on the behalf of her uncle, ending up in stifling position again.

But Imina was different. He didn't fear her, he didn't honour her, he wouldn't even look at her in admiration. It didn't seem like he was any nervous speaking with her, not just that, he also spoke to her in a crude manner.

Although Sashtal was close to being rude, he did that on purpose. After acknowledging that Milifica wanted to live as a normal drill student, he intentionally kept his cool when speaking with her. In Imina's case, he couldn't care less about her right from the start. He probably didn't have any awareness that she was a special existence. As if, he was only looking at something else——something far away.

Milifica felt like ahead of his gaze, there was something she's been always looking for.

She was craving. She was unsatisfied from an early age. There was nothing specific she wanted. However, she didn't have enough. That's how she felt.

There wasn't enough of something. She wanted something. She had no idea what that is, but she knew that it was something she would never be able to get in the royal palace.

That's why she felt stifled living as part of royal family. She sought salvation in the swordsmanship women were unsuited for, but it didn't fill the vacant space in her heart completely. The war with elves had begun, she wished to stand on frontlines and fight, actually left the Imperial City using her uncle's connections to enter drill school——but still, she wasn't fulfilled.

Perhaps, Imina knew the *identity* of what she was craving for?

The thing Milifica was looking for ever since she was born. That, was surely, *important enough to stop caring about the royal family she was part of.*

And——.

As she thought, almost dreaming, abnormal noise had reached her ears.

It was the sound of the classroom's door opening.

The wooden door matched the frugal spirit of the school and wasn't decorated, but it was quite sturdy, it made a heavy and dull distinctive creaking sound when opening and closing. At times like the beginning of the lectures, it serves as a signal for the students' bustle to stop as the instructor entered.

However, it was the middle of a lecture now and there was no reason for the door to open. The lecturer who explained the formation of a troop of hundred equipped with magical swords had stopped moving and made a dubious expression.

The one who entered the classroom, was Milifica's friend.

Vint Culias.

The eldest son of the Marquis Household Culias, a fellow executive officer. The Culias' family was on friendly terms with Yusala Ducal household for a long time, so he grew up together with Milifica as childhood friends. Although, Culias household swore allegiance to Yusala that was a royal family, but Vint didn't follow in their example. He chased after Milifica to the drill school and thought of himself as of a vassal rather than a classmate, no matter how many times she reproached him he continued to call her per "Princess".

Vint breathed roughly, panicked, almost as if he was running just earlier.

The classroom was swallowed in silence.

Which was why Milifica stood up.

"What happened, Vint."

She was raised so that she takes initiative at times like these, but she wasn't aware of that herself.

"If you come over looking so pale, your dignity will be questioned."

As one of the executive officers, as the eldest son of a marquis household, he should maintain calm during any crisis. Once upset, a person can't act properly.

Even as he was chided, Vint's complexion remained pale.

He looked over the classroom for an instant, breathed in deeply and spoke with well-resounding voice.

"I'm sorry, Princess. However... this is horrible."

"Then, can you relay it here?"

She asked quietly. Whether it's something to speak in front of the public or not, Milifica trusted Vint in that aspect. he was intelligent and wouldn't make that kind of decision wrong.

"...yes. Immediately, I believe all students should learn of this."

"Very well. Say it then."

With graceful appearance and attitude, Vint was very popular among students. He had the power to attract and lead the others. That's why he definitely won't confuse students.

"Yes, my apologies."

He raised his left hand to his face, turned it outwards and stretched his finger stood straight on the floor——saluting according to Yusala drill's school method, he spoke solemnly.

"Just earlier, Instructor Shishirii... his body was found."

Hearing that——the atmosphere in the classroom froze.

These words felt unreal, everyone understood their meaning.

Even Milifica was perplexed.

"That's..."

Shishirii Fairthread was a middle-aged male instructor in charge of history.

Although he looked thin, was lacking dignity and gave off spineless impression, he was loved by the students for his meek and gentle personality.

She remembered passing by him in the hallway three days earlier. He smiled in response when she nodded to him. Back then it didn't seem like there was anything strange going on. In that case, possibly,

"I have discovered him myself. About a day has passed since his death."

As if to answer her silent question, Vint nodded and looked up at Milifica.

"...he was murdered."

With these words, it seemed like temperature in the classroom dropped.

The students' silence was finally broken.

"What does this mean...?"

"Shishirii-sensei was...? No way right?"

"Murdered, you mean he was killed? Why?"

Whispers could be heard all over. No wonder. This was a serious matter.

However, when the buzz in the classroom had changed into bustle,

"Wait."

The instructor who stood on the platform, Ella Moiip had restrained Vint.

He was a burly, middle-aged man.

"Vint Culias-kun. I am aware you're not one to come up with boring mischief but... this morning, I have met with Instructor Shishirii. Isn't it funny that his corpse was discovered a day after his death?"

Ella frowned with confusion and anger.

With the contradiction in the report pointed out, everyone was dumbfounded.

"It might be just that you have estimated the time that passed after his death wrongly... but certainly, your reputation as 'serious and honest student' might suffer drastically from that, you know?"

If this is a tasteless mischief, I won't forgive it, he meant.

But on the other hand, a different emotion had sprung up inside Milifica's chest.

It was, discomfort she felt towards Vint.

It wasn't about the time that elapsed since Shishirii's death, nor about mischief, rather than that ——it was something only she, who spent a lot of time with him as childhood friends would notice.

In the first place, Shishirii Fairthread was an academic teacher who was involved in the historical research Culias household had invested in. Culias household was seeing to it and appointed him as an instructor together with Vint's admission. Vint ought to admire him ever since young.

And yet. Even though they were acquainted since he was young, a person he was close to was killed——why is it.

Why is Vint making *such a refreshed expression.*

When he rushed to the classroom he seemed panicked. Out of breath. But now he was calm and collected. He ignored Instructor Ella glaring straight in his face.

To think of it, wasn't that distraught attitude of his, acting?

"I see, your doubts are reasonable."

Vint smiled at the Instructor.

And next, while overlooking everyone, frozen and breathless,

"However, as you said, I'm not a man who would deal with petty mischief. Also, I wouldn't misjudge the elapsed time after someone's death. Instructor Shishirii being killed is an indisputable fact. He died yesterday and was discovered in the empty warehouse building in the south-west corner. ...of course, what you're saying is also correct. You certainly did meet Instructor Shishirii this morning."

Somehow, he looked triumphant.

"What are you..."

"Did you know? Elven organic necromancy can be also used for disguising themselves. They can change their bodies and take someone else's appearance. However, toying around with entire skeleton and physique as far as to even falsify one's age... among the fairy folk, only my *best friend* is capable of that."

Unable to bear it, Milifica cried out.

"Vint!"

She understood the meaning of what he said.

Her heart turned cold.

Her subordinate, her best friend, her childhood friend. Vint Culias——she had completely misunderstood him. Moreover, *this entire time since they were children, too.*

"You, it can't be..."

"Instructor Ella, everyone."

Vint spoke loudly.

"I shall show you how did instructor Shishirii die. Look, just like this!"

Then he elegantly held his beloved sword he had by his waist, pulled it within a single breath and swung, towards Instructor Ella's neck right in front of him——brilliantly beheading him.

clank. The head fell to the ground soundly. Blood soundly sprayed upwards from Ella's neck and then his body fell to the ground. The splash of blood stained Vint's cheeks and classroom's walls, the students' screams resounded in the classrooms after a few seconds.

"Princess... ohh, my lovely, beloved Highness, Princess Milifica!"

Vint spread his arms exaggeratedly.

Tasting the screams of his classmates as if they were cheers, he looked towards the student seat in the centre——towards Milifica who stood there stunned and spoke with burning obsession in his eyes.

"I... Vint Culias, want to taste your despair!"

Screams have come not just from the classroom but could be also heard——that's right, *from the outside.*

It wasn't just cries of fear. There were roars that were like despair, squeezed out of people's throats, wails rejecting everything as if one wanted to escape into their shell, screams of those who couldn't understand what's happening in front of them, shrieks like the sound of pain itself, death throes played on the vocal cords when one's life ends. And mixed in it, was what wasn't that of humans, growls of magical beasts and demons.

Milifica didn't understand what was happening yet.

Still, she did understand what had started.

3

Sashtal Dei was reminded of the time when he put his head right into a tub with entrails.

It was an unpleasant memory from his childhood.

His father hunted down a big boar. It was something common in their home and young Sashtal was often made to help out, it was the same on that day. The blood was drained, it was put in boiling water and then shaved, skin removed and the abdomen was cut apart, while washing it all in the middle the meat was sorted. The unusable parts——hair and guts, as well as brain that's never eaten otherwise one shall invoke the punishment of the mountain god——all of it was thrown into a big wooden box for the sake of holding a memorial service and burying in the mountain. That was the entrails' tub.

It was in the middle of work. He stumbled and fell over with the remaining casual momentum, ending up sucked headlong into the tub. It was small enough so that an adult could raise it with both hands, but for a child it was quite a thing. Sashtal plunged into a messy blood bath with entrails, hair and bones of a beast, because of the terrible odour he fainted while vomiting whatever was in his stomach back then. Even now, more than a ten years later, it was stuck in his head as the most hideous memory in his entire life.

However, *this happening* now——was something that exceeded the horribleness of that tub.

After all, the blood and entrails scattered around here because of that commotion were not that of a single boar, but they were all those of humans. He didn't jump headlong into the tub with entrails and didn't dirty his body, just that one point might have been better.

However, were he to bathe in human entrails, he would grow insane by now.

The classroom was in a horrible state.

Torn apart corpses, corpses that no longer retain their original shape, fractions of corpses that still have their original shape. At a glance, he could see completely untouched lower body, he wondered where has the other part gone. There were about a dozen of people like that. Probably. He couldn't bring himself to count accurately.

His salvation was that there was no corpse of any of his friends. As far as he could see the faces, that is.

This wasn't Sashtal's class. It were the two adjacent ones, third and fourth graduating class. Why were they here, that's because they fled into here. Why did they remain here, that's because they were hiding in here.

When the demons and magical beasts attacked, Sashtal's classroom fell in just a few minutes. There were people who tried to bravely confront the enemy, but it could be seen that they were easily beaten by Orcs and then everyone lost their will to fight. They were torn into pieces,

some died, some might have escaped.

It wasn't that he didn't try thinking of doing something. Sashtal was one of the executive officers, he was in the right position to organise the people. However, calming panicked allies and telling them to defeat a powerful enemy, doing both of these was impossible for him and his own strength.

Escaping was fine, but there were magical beasts and demons all over the place. As a result, he took temporary shelter, choosing the *location where the monsters have already finished their slaughter.* As a result, he cowered while suppressing nausea he felt because of the odour of human entrails.

Sashtal wasn't the only one left in the classroom.

There were other people who thought of doing the same, three people in total including himself. They muffled their breathing together. it wasn't just Sashtal.

"No more. No no nooo..."

One of them was a schoolgirl who hugged her head, her teeth chattering. Her eyes behind her round glasses displayed fear. Certainly, her name was Laimi Selea-Shutimeryl. The famous bookworm second year——one year below Sashtal. She always confined herself in the library and her performance was poor, because she indulged herself in reading even the books that were covered in dust completely, she was derided as "De-dusting Laimi".

"...compared to that girl, you're quite calm. I'm envious, Sashtal."

The other one said, losing all their mood and temper.

The other one was a man and Sashtal's classmate, they were acquainted. Fream Eiza. Normally, a reliable man with big physique had holed himself up in here as if tired.

"Not really."

Sashtal responded with a thin smile. It was dangerous to recklessly raise his voice, but the silence was also depressing. It should be fine to speak with each other by whispering.

"My head just didn't catch up yet, I'm pathetic."

"Still, that makes no difference, you've got nerves of steel compared to someone like me."

He wasn't as positive and had high enough self-evaluation to nod. Therefore, he only responded with a wry smile.

"But... I wonder what the hell happened."

The half-monologue of Fream's had left Sashtal at loss.

Sashtal snorted in self-mockery.

"I haven't the least idea what's happening either. Just..."

"Just?"

"What we call 'war' was much closer than we had imagined."

"You're right... yeah, it's just as you say."

They thought they would have entered the battlefield after graduating from the drill school, at earliest in the next year. But this——was far more horribly different from what they thought "entering the battlefield" would be.

Right now, the humans were being invaded by elves, they were on the side that was being invaded.

Therefore, entering the battlefield was the exclusive privilege of the side invading. Those being invaded could only receive enemy on the battlefield. In other words, *the place they were living in would turn into the battlefield.*

The Great Astozellen Fortress was currently the line of defence, so this side of the fortress is safe right? That's a terrible misunderstanding. A mere illusion. In fact, aren't the demons and magical beasts all over the place?

A small group, at worst it could be even a raid of a troop led by a single elf.

They infiltrated in order to crush the drill school and kill the human resources that are to serve as future officers, aiming to weaken humans in a long-term. It was a very sensible strategy. It's far more stranger they haven't executed it yet.

"This is no joke, really."

"Yeah, not a joke at all. What are we doing, spacing out here."

"Good grief..."

And so——as Sashtal and Fream spoke like that and smiled at each other mockingly.

"Mm...? Hey, be silent for a second."

Sashtal's ears captured the sounds of footsteps coming from outside the classroom.

"What is it?"

"Someone's coming."

It wasn't a demon nor oa magical beast. Demons were walking very noisily, magical beasts' steps crept very fast. He concentrated on his hearing. It was something human. Their number ——was two.

But, they were slightly strange.

Normally, if one walked through the corridor in such a situation they would move timidly and quietly as not to be found by demons or magical beasts, terrified by the corpses lying around. And yet, the two's footsteps felt imposing. As if they owned the corridor they walked through. Or rather, as if to show off where they are.

The walking stopped. *Right in front of this classroom.*

After a moment, the door had opened with a heavy, creaking sound.

Laimi was startled. Fream gasped. Sashtal got up on his knee in alert and stretched his hands towards his weapon at his waist.

The ones coming in, weren't this school's students.

Although they met just yesterday, their faces were remaining deep in Sashtal's memory.

"You guys..."

They were the travellers applying to be mercenaries——Imina and Ellis.

"Sashtal, huh. Also, Fream, was it? Great that you're all right."

Recognizing the red-haired acquaintance's face, although still grim, Sashtal smiled lightly.

"Is that girl all right?"

"Yeah, the three of us aren't hurt. ...why are you here?"

"When we were shopping in the city the students have came down the hill in a group. When I caught one and asked what happened, I was told demons and magical beasts appeared. So, I came."

"Heyhey, you serious?"

——"So, I came" he said?

He said that without any hesitation, but it was incredibly outrageous.

Normally, students would escape. The city's inhabitants should have evacuated as well. And yet, these two have come over with just the two of them despite not knowing how many monsters are roaming over here.

"You said you aren't hurt, can you stand?"

He briskly walked over. There was nothing in his footsteps that would imply they he was scared, after all. Also, whether its the ghastly sight of the corpses or the horrible smell that came from them, none of those changed his expressions.

And that wasn't just Imina, but also Ellis. Although she made a sad expression, as if mourning, she didn't look like she was intimidated, disgusted nor scared at all.

Sashtal trembled, from the bottom of his heart.

Once again he thought. These two are different.

They were overwhelmingly, decisively different from Sashtal and others.

"Hii..."

The female student who was called out to——Laimi looked up at Imina and let out a quiet

scream.

"Ellis, please."

"Yes."

After Imina requested her to take his place, Ellis crouched in front of the girl instead of him.

"Are you hurt? It's all right now."

She gently stroked the girl's head and nodded to her. Involuntarily, Sashtal and Fream's nervousness was solved by her lovely smile and they felt at rest. As if a flower had bloomed in the middle of gruesome bloodbath.

"Hii...w-wrong..."

However, Laimi still lightly shook her head.

Still frightened, her pale complexion didn't change. No, it had become worse than it was earlier.

She stretched her hands trembling, towards further behind Ellis, pointing with her finger towards the entrance to the classroom——.

"You...'re wr...ong. That... that! NOOOOOOOOOOO!!!"

And let out an immediate scream.

"......!!"

Sashtal looked towards there and grit his teeth. He was careless. He should have expected this. Why did he loosen his vigilance. As long as they're careful they shouldn't have been found.

From the left-opened doors, *monsters* have sneaked in.

The pig demon——Orc. And, the little demon——Goblin.

One of those types each, total of two.

They were wandering around here and probably perceived the signs of human life.

"Damn it...!"

He involuntarily cursed. Impatience ran through his entire body.

It was fortunate he didn't feel too scared. Perhaps because he was born in a hunter's house, or maybe perhaps because there were lots of bears in his home village——he was accustomed to standing in front of an enemy he can't match. Although, there was also possibility that he could have been paralysed completely.

Sashtal desperately forced his head to think. Now, what to do.

His body moved. For now let's fight, so he intended.

What about Fream. His eyes didn't lose their light yet. He stood up holding the magical spear he was carrying. It must have been impossible to move for the female student. In that case, if they include Imina and Ellis at lowest they'll have three people capable of fighting. They had numeric advantage over the opponent.

If they restrain the enemy and escape meanwhile, they might actually survive somehow——.

While continuing his wishful thinking, he put a hand on his magical sword's hilt.

The dagger he had by the waist. In his home village it was called a "Kukri", a warped blade that slightly mimicked a machete. It wasn't suitable for fighting a huge body. If anything, he'll take the Goblin on.

After thinking up to that point, he realized something.

Imina and Ellis——the two's attitude, they were awfully calm.

In front of two demons they displayed no agitation, fear, not even nervousness.

Even Ellis must have realized from the breathing of the monsters, but she didn't look back. She was disinterested in the crisis crawling from behind, instead she held the head of trembling Laimi and pat her back gently.

She smiled.

"Don't worry. I told you right? ...that *it's all right now.*"

At the same time.

Imina took a step forward.

He held the sword hilt by the waist of the sword that was pointing behind him and unsheathed it. A one-handed swords for duelling——Falchion. It was thick, wide, and double-edged, Sashtal involuntarily gasped.

A magical sword, probably. But it felt different from the "magical swords" he knew.

First, the sword's guard connecting the hilt and the blade.

In most of the magical swords the engine was located there. The evocation engravings were placed in it for the sake of activating inorganic necromancy, the spirit energy tube loaded with highly concentrated spirit energy, trigger for activating the evocation——all of it was combined into one machine.

The engine part of a Juelamil method magical sword was big but had almost no limit when it came to amount of evocations that could be used, the engine of Eftal method magical sword had a limited amount of evocations but had a small engine instead. However, the sword held by Imina looked like it didn't have an engine in the first place. The sword guard had an original, old design, it was very small and simple. It made Sashtal think there was no mechanical parts used in it.

Instead, the blade was bizarre.

The colour of it was translucent red——deep crimson. Like fire, or rather, like blood.

Of course, it wasn't iron nor bronze. Is there a metal that has this kind of colour in the first place? The often-used Blazing Iron and Solar Ore don't have such vivid crimson colour. Rather, it looked more like jewellery, like ruby or red corals rather than a metal. Jewellery wasn't suitable for making a magical sword's blade. It was a material that blacksmiths at most be used for constructing a part of the blade's core.

The crimson blade had a complex pattern engraved on its surface.

Although it was reminiscent of engraved evocation, in fact it was more like a counterfeit. The engraved evocation was a circuit for providing fixed directivity for the spirit energy to circulate through, the route had to necessarily be looped, in other words, it had to have a shape of a constantly connected crest. However, the pattern engraved on Imina's sword wasn't like a crest——it was more like one of the tattoo's southern barbarians put on their bodies. If spirit energy flows into it, it will *move in only one direction.*

In other words, from the very top to the very bottom, it was outside of what Sashtal knew that defines a "magical sword".

However, to say it wasn't a magical sword, that it was just a normal weapon, that would be wrong too. It had a way too abnormal feel to it to be called just a weapon. There must have been a reason for *looking like this*. The meaning behind the material similar to blood and the bizarre pattern engraved on the blade's surface.

Imina raised his sword.

He entered the same stance he had when he faced in a match against Milifica. He moved half of his body and his left foot in front, moved the sword to the right and lowered it. It was a natural stance without any strength put in to it. Originally, it must have been a stance for using with a Falchion. Compared to when he used it with a wooden sword, it looked much more appropriate.

Sashtal realized he was staring and hurriedly stood up. He pulled out the Kukri and entered a stance. No matter how composed he was, no matter what kind of power his weapon had, Imina alone was definitely unable to take on two monsters at once. First of all, Sashtal must assist him, attract the attention of the monster Imina isn't dealing with at the moment——while he thought so, Sashtal's body was,

"...eh?"

Unable to react to the enemy's first move.

The Goblin's hideous mouth was distorted with a grin and it abruptly moved.

Its aim wasn't Imina who moved in front, but the one who acted leisurely behind him——in other words, Sashtal. The monster with ugly blue skin curled up and leaped aiming with its sharply pointed claws and fangs.

The Goblin was more agile than a small monkey and the thirst of blood couldn't be read ahead of time. Sashtal was hunted in the woods ever since young age, it turned out that the demon wasn't just a beast, but more of a beast that had a human's common knowledge. Yeah, I'm dead,

he thought. Ironically, from the experience he had as a hunter, he confidently believed he won't be able to avoid the attack.

What toppled his prediction, was Imina.

He read the Goblin's thirst for blood and the moment it would jump. Then, he moved one step to the side casually and raised his sword locating it in the middle of the Goblin's leaping trajectory. However, rather than as a blade he poised it with the flat side, supporting it with his left arm he used it as if it was a shield.

The Goblin's body collided with the crimson blade. The clash was the Goblin's loss, it had a low body weight and was agile instead. With a dull sound and an unpleasant scream it rebounded and rolled on the floor.

Instantly, Imina counter-attacked.

A truly lightning speed attack.

He stooped and kicked off the floor, chasing after the Goblin. The falchion was slightly retracted from Imina's body. There, Sashtal noticed that his sword started *emitting light*.

That's right——it was light. The falchion was dimly shining. It wasn't an illusion nor it reflected the light from the window. The blade released light, as if shooting fireflies.

That blade emitting a dim red phosphorescence had slashed from below and gouged Goblin's body.

thud.

The Goblin was simply, all-too-easily cut in two. The upper and lower body separated diagonally, then rolled two, three times while screaming its death throes that one couldn't bear to hear before dying in convulsions.

"What...!?"

Sashtal couldn't believe his eyes.

No matter how small its body was, it was a demon. It's skin was hard and the mucles tough, it should have been tougher than any human living in the world. No——the robustness wasn't the strangest thing in the first place. Imina moved very quickly, he shouldn't be able to put in too much strength into that attack.

Speaking of which, the moment he slashed it looked like the light in his sword had disappeared.

So *that* was the trick.

"Buu-oo, UooOWOOA!"

Seeming angry after having a comrade killed, the Orc howled.

This one was a monster called a pig demon. It had an ugly and swollen body, a big pig nose and and stretched out face like a wild boar, one of its characteristics were that it was greedy for food and reproduction. With thick layer of fat under its green skin, a half-hearted slash wouldn't

pass through it. Although sluggish, it was powerful. People feared it on par with the Ogres.

While moving roughly, its footsteps letting out blunt sounds, the Orc moved towards them. It swung its palm that made a human's arm look like a pencil horizontally, like a slap, to cleave down Imina's body.

"......!! Avoid it!"

Sashtal shouted involuntarily.

But, Imina did not avoid. Just like he did earlier he used the sword as a shield supporting it with his left arm and tried to receive the Orc's blow——they clashed. *There was no way he could withstand that blow.*

Like a piece of dead wood, his body was blown away.

He rammed into a line of desks lined up in a circle on top of a platform. The wood broke with a loud sound. Driven by agitation Sashtal ran over to him, wondering if he took the hit passively and endured the shock.

However, Imina who slowly got up and trampled over the broken desks,

"No... way."

Had a completely calm expression.

Trickling from his forehead, blood had flowed over his cheeks. He had abrasions on his elbows and knees. But it still weren't fatal injuries. He must have turned away the impact during the clash and absorbed it with the sword. It was an incredible feat.

"...hmph, it wasn't too bad."

Imina crudely wiped off the blood around his eyes and made a thin smile.

Smiling, he glimpsed at the falchion in his hand.

"Thanks to that, *I accumulated quite a bit.*"

Compared to when he cut the Goblin earlier, his blade *shone with much more intense light.*

The brilliance was strong enough to cause light pain in Sashtal's retina. The blade left a faint afterglow at its trajectory when moving. Sashtal understood. He realized what was the characteristic of that magical sword.

All Imina did was necessary. He *deliberately received the attack with his sword*. The Goblin's charge, the Orc's slap and being blown away together with it.

And, *he accumulated.* The received shock was stored in the blade.

Did such evocation really exist——did such magical sword really exist.

Imina clenched his lips. Although the Orc snorted disgruntled and faced towards him from the front, he set up the sword emitting crimson light with just one hand.

Seeing that sight, Sashtal suddenly remembered something.

Yeah, that's right. Yesterday, haven't I said it myself.

After Milifica's match finished, he explained it with a smug look.

That Imina is a spitting image of an infamous insane big bear "Blackback" from his home village.

He assessed that the first blow he'll receive won't be fatal and after knowing that, he received it without avoiding. And from there, he calmly starts his counter-attack.

This guy truly uses *that kind of fighting style*——.

Imina rushed maintaining his body low. Passing by the Orc's body he cleaved at it.

The blade's flash clad in red light had continued to pass through the place it entered, the light turning into destructive force itself had bisected the Orc. The hard skin, thick fat and sturdy bones were helpless against it.

The demon cut in two simply fell to the floor.

After making sure the Orc was dead, Imina sheathed his sword again.

He overlooked the classroom that smelled with entrails once again, confirming there was no other survivors. Since there was no signs of people other than that of Sashtal's, he heaved a light sigh and turned around to them.

"How is it, can you stand?"

It was about twenty minutes since he entered the campus. He killed all the demons and magical beasts he found on the way not leaving a single one and it was the fourth time he helped survivors.

But, this time he found a few acquaintances.

Sashtal Dei of the executives and Fream with whom he spoke this morning. He didn't know the name of the remaining girl, but in any case——it seemed like they were all safe.

"Thanks, you saved us."

Sashtal thanked him on behalf of everyone.

"Not even exaggerating, you saved our lives. We owe you a huge debt."

"I don't mind."

Imina shook his head. For him, seeing acquaintances alive was good enough. Even if they have only met once, he didn't want to see a corpse of someone he knew. It was a really unpleasant thing.

He glanced at the tree.

Sashtal seemed like he wanted to say something. Fream made a difficult expression, lost in thoughts. Also, the girl who sobbed convulsively while being embraced by Ellis.

Imina noticed what could be seen in their pupils.

"I'll be proceeding ahead."

Turned with his back to them and looking towards the classroom's door, he said.

"There might be other survivors. Also... the one who released those monsters should be here."

"An elf...? In school, here?"

"Yeah, probably."

He unconsciously bit his lips.

That's right. An elf.

The demons and magical beasts are in the end, mere pawns.

Unless he cuts down the ringleader, this tragedy probably won't end——.

Once again he turned towards the three and asked.

"So, what are you guys going to do?"

"What will you do... is that something you ask people who're trembling in fear?"

As Sashtal scratched his head, Imina laughed in response.

"Let me rephrase it then, Sashtal Dei. Are you going to put up airs at a time like this, too?"

"Ohh."

Sashtal made a bitter expression. It was right on target.

Therefore, Imina pursued it again.

"The ones I saved up until now were all completely terrified folks. But, at least you are different. You aren't frightened to the point where you can't move an inch either. Still, you didn't escape. You remained in the school. In other words you... *have something you need to do in here,* am I wrong?"

As if resigning himself, Sashtal raised both his hands.

"Good grief. And here I thought it might be easier to leave all to you."

"I don't mind if you do. If you are fine with that."

"That's great, is what I'd like to say, but I can't do that. Call it my pride."

"What about you?"

Imina asked Fream and the girl.

There was a moment of silence.

The one who spoke first, was Fream.

"...I probably won't be of any use. I'll hold you back."

He faced downwards in a gesture not fitting his posture, his voice trembled.

But, he clenched his fists tightly. Imina knew that the light that was in Fream's eyes when he looked as Imina fought didn't disappear.

Fream raised his face. Puffing his chest as hard as he could with bravado,

"But, despite that... is it fine?"

"Yeah."

Sashtal nodded in response to the question.

There was no more hesitation in their pupils. No anxiety in their attitude.

The words they said no longer shook.

"This is already the battlefield and we are warriors. Just earlier we were apprentices in the drill school but... even if we are students, the moment we enter the battlefield we turn into warriors, don't we. If a comrade is fighting, would a warrior abandon them?"

Called a comrade by Fream, Sashtal silently hit his shoulder.

And, Imina glanced beside the two,

"M... my na...me is Laimi Selea-Shutimeryl."

The girl whose sobs subsided flared up and spoke.

"I... um, love books... I'm bad with speaking to people, and my practicals are terrible... so, everyone laughs at me as 'De-dusting Laimi'."

Sashtal and Fream were astounded by this sudden self-introduction.

But Imina wasn't surprised.

As if to encourage her, Ellis held her hand firmly.

"But... but..."

The girl——Laimi, said.

"Just lady Milifica... the Representative, won't laugh at me. She praised me, that it's a splendid thing to love books. Learn more from the books and then, one day, get used to the battlefield and take command for the sake of saving the country, she encouraged me. That's why, I... I...!!"

"Sorry, Laimi."

As she seemed like she's going to cry again, Sashtal bowed his head to her.

"I also remembered you as 'De-dusting Laimi'. I sincerely apologize for that. Would you allow me to correct it?"

Both Sashtal and Fream, finally understood.

"You're a courageous student. I... we salute you."

Even though she was scared enough to cry, she didn't run away.

Certainly, she might have been unable to move. She might have trembled in despair. Nevertheless, it wasn't that she was unable to escape.

She did not try to escape.

And the reason for that was,

"How troublesome. Our representative definitely remained in here."

"If the general is fighting, the soldiers can't just escape, can they."

"I... don't want to end this as a laughingstock. I want lady Milifica to praise me again!"

It seemed like all of them felt the same.

As a representative, Sashtal stood in front of Imina.

"Sorry. We might be a bother to you, but..."

"I don't mind. If I really thought it's a bother, I wouldn't have asked what do you want to do."

Just as he said, he didn't expect them to be of help as part of fighting force.

It just overlapped. It overlapped with his memories.

With the Salaido from four years ago.

Just like it was here, when elves used demons and magical beasts to attack, Imina couldn't do anything. The villagers, the family, his important people——even though he wanted to save them, it did not come true.

If they save themselves by escaping, they will definitely regret it. Just like Imina's, their hearts will be wounded and they will suffer forever.

That's why if they want to come, he'll take them together with him.

Even if they are of no use, even if they hold him back.

"All right."

Imina breathed in, smelling the same odour as the one from four years ago, he clenched his teeth.

He met Ellis' gaze——she nodded.

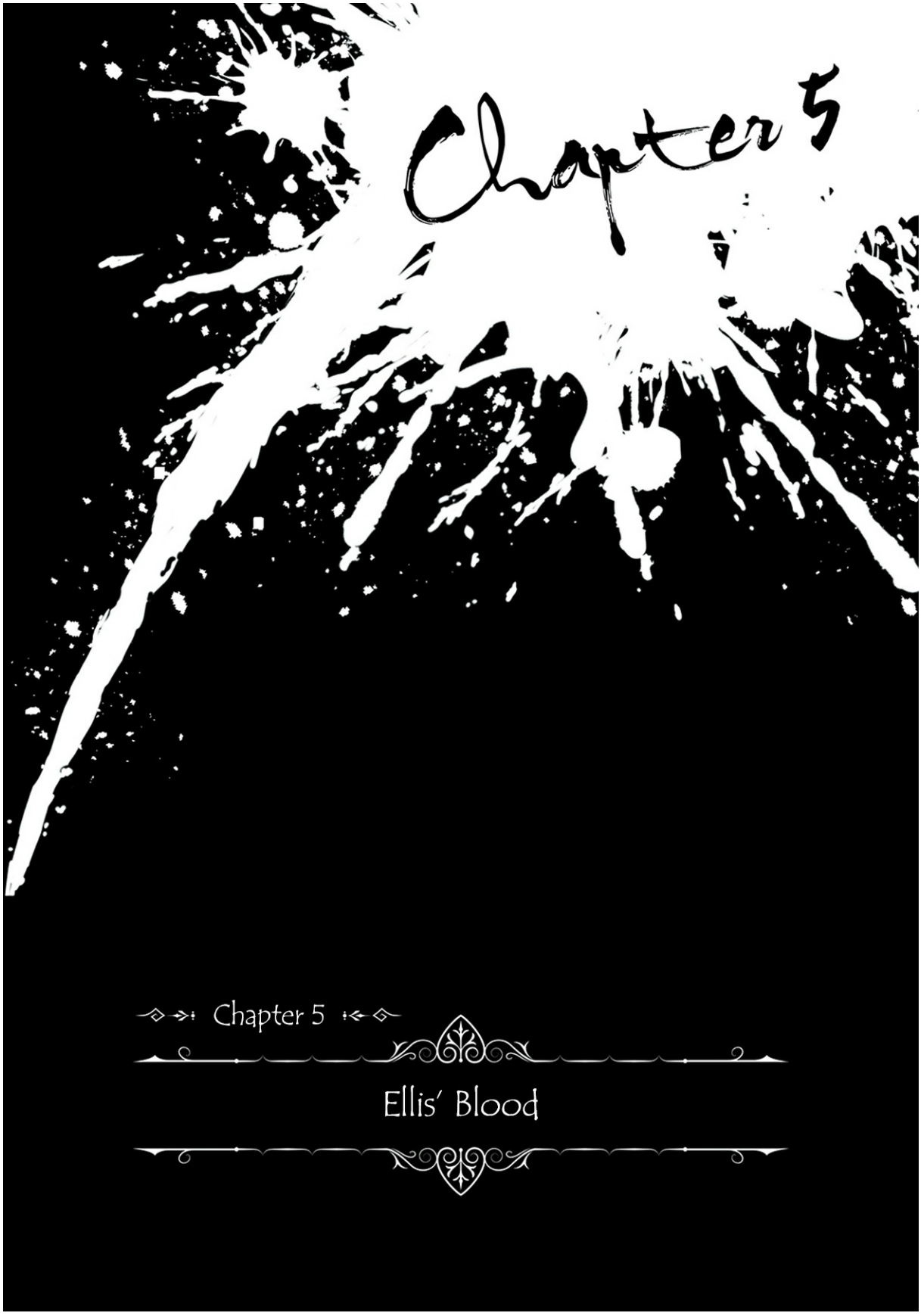
"Well then, let's go."

He prompted Sashtal and others who made thoughtful expressions and turned around on his heel towards the classroom's door.

They won't become like he did back then. He won't allow that.

He will protect them, and the people they hold dear.

And above all, there's something I need to do.



1

Vint Culias had always yearned for Milifica Yusala Astozellen.

During the civil war six hundred years ago, one of the Culias had saved the life of the Duke Yusala and had reportedly been knighted on the battlefield. Since then, the Marquis household Culias was a faithful vassal of Yusala Duke household and their relationship had continued even now.

Vint had met Milifica before he had become aware of that.

He grew up being taught that she is the lord he has to serve by risking his life. Vint himself had thought that becoming a sword and shield of her Royal Highness was his inborn mission.

Ever since Milifica was able to practice swordsmanship, something women weren't suited for, she had become especially passionate. There was an anecdote about the Culias household's founder from six hundred years ago—— apparently the Yusala household's family head at the time of civil war was a beautiful, armour-clad female knight.

Vint's father had half-jokingly said that it might be "the repeat of the history", thus Vint had overlapped his dream of the far past with himself and Milifica.

If they were both boys, or their genders were to be in reverse, it probably wouldn't turn out so. In fact, Vint's father and Milifica's father had a relationship that was more like friends rather than a lord and the vassal.

In any case, Vint Culias had loved Her Highness Princess Milifica to the point of worship. He was extremely delighted to be her personal attendant and was proud they could be together, her appearance in his memories was his joy. He grew up like that and thought it was natural.

Milifica was a beautiful girl, ever since she was young up until now.

She was a child that smiled very often——just how many times had he seen her smiling face up until now. Her figure as she chased after the mansion's guards——he chased after it on daily basis. There were times where she stumbled and started crying——at that time he passed her a handkerchief so that she could wipe the tears from her blue eyes. Every day where she absorbed herself in sweating during practice with wooden swords——he also practised swordsmanship beside her. Her defiant expression when she received a sermon from her father "It's isn't befitting royal family"——and then she ran away from home, rushing to the Culias household's mansion. Even so, she had a strong will and didn't stop her sword practice——Vint also went with her to convince her father. With age she started to change and calm down——he was pleased with that change, but at the same time lonely. Before long her appearance had changed into one that had both grace and dignity——he was moved and glad that she was the lord he served. Her face when she first heard the elves have invaded——it wasn't an angry nor sad one, but an unmistakable light of determination had dwelled in her eyes. She enrolled in the drill school——in the uniform, and in it, she looked ever more dignified.

She did the daily chores as a representative of the drill school, was at a loss during the life in dormitory she wasn't familiar with, learned the difficulties of a person who stands at the top, she came in contact regardless of whether they are commoners or not, enjoyed her freedom living as a student rather than as a princess——all of her feelings, all her expressions, Vint looked at them in detail every day and took pride in it. Then one day, he noticed.

He ended up noticing.

That he, still hasn't seen her face, wailing in despair.

It was strange. Even though he should have engraved *all* of Milifica in his eyes, why were there still emotions, faces, expressions he still hasn't seen.

It wasn't just her face as she despairs. He had no idea what expression will she make when she's hit. He had no idea what kind of emotions will she outbrust with when her clothes are stripped off and she's raped. How would she looked when she's being strangled. What kind of death throes would she raise when he pierces her and gouges her womb with a sword.

He can't forgive it that there's a part of Milifica he doesn't know.

Unless he knows it all, he won't feel at ease——

You're insane, Milifica said. Since when have you turned like this, she said. But Vint wasn't aware of his own insanity. If he really was insane, then he must have been so right from the beginning. That's right——right from the beginning. Ever since he met her.

After all, Vint was born holding responsibility of seeing entirety of Milifica with his own eyes.

And Milifica's duty as his lord, was to show Vint everything.

Hearing Vint Culias talk passionately, Milifica stared at him stunned, pale.

From the very core of her heart she felt a sense of loss and fear.

He was a gentle and well-behaved boy. They were always together since young age, he was passionate about his loyalty to Milifica therefore she trusted him from the bottom of her heart. Even though he was her servant she was dissatisfied about the distance between them. Just like with their fathers, she wished that they would become close friends one day. If they treat each other with respect as drill students in this school, she expected them to shrink the distance between them by the graduation.

——And yet.

Since when have you turned like this, the answer to that question was simple.

"Right from the start."

In other words, ever since Vint was aware of his surroundings, *he was like this*.

His manners and justice, gentleness, as well as allegiance to Milifica, it was probably all result of the madness that has distorted him. Her own trust and affection towards him was all fruitless effort right from the start——just like in a fairy tale about a blind girl who misunderstood a man-eating monster for her friend.

The classroom was shrouded in silence.

Milifica stood in front of the platform. The point of Vint's rapier was right at her throat and she was unable to move. Reflected in her field of view were several corpses. Instructor Ella's head and about a dozen of classmates.

About a half of her classmates had escaped outside. In the end, those who took that action have all turned away and escaped deserting, abandoning Milifica who was part of the royal family and the representative, but she didn't feel like blaming them. Rather, she felt sorry towards the dozen that were brave enough to try to protect her.

The ones who killed her classmates were Vint, and,

"Kufu-fufu."

Laughing in a neurotic manner in the corner of the classroom, a tall man. He had a light blue-tinted hair that extended up to the nape of his neck, slender limbs and body, white skin and good features, as well as pointed ears——in other words, an elf. In addition to that, there was a single Ogre listening to this elf's orders.

It was a terrifying giant demon even worse than what she has seen in the textbooks and illustrations, with huge body, it was stronger and more ferocious than she imagined from the texts. Now it was quiet and stood behind the elf, but it could mercilessly attack Milifica with one hand.

She was forced to discard the sword long ago. There was no way for her to resist.

Even so, Milifica remained firm, she glared at Vint and asked.

"...why?"

"By why, you mean? If it's my objective it's as I have told you earlier, I want you to..."

"Wrong. Why have you joined the enemy, is what I'm asking."

Her line of sight was turned towards the elf, she glanced at him sharply.

"If you wished to see my face as I suffer you could have used drugs to paralyse me and sneak into my room, and only had to pin me down right. And yet, it seems like you have made your objective even greater. For the elves you betrayed us, the country... the human race. What is the reason for that?"

The elf——certainly, he was called Kuzan——made a cool expression despite having that pointed out. While ignoring Milifica's hostility, smiled with contemplation.

"An intelligent woman, your nerves are also of steel. I see, leaving her as a human is a waste."

"Answer my question!"

He shrugged meaningfully.

"The war between the elves and humans. Did you think *that's all* you need to describe this war?"

Milifica squinted at these enigmatic, suggestive words.

"It all boils down to *politics*, Princess."

The one who answered instead, was Vint.

He stifled his vulgar laughter, still, he stretched his spine like a noble.

"You probably aren't aware, about this country. No, you believe it... that the empire is monolithic, and the human beings together are trying to prevent the invasion of united elves."

"What... do you mean?"

The response, was a smile that seemed like it would trample over Milifica's feelings.

"*There is a considerable amount of humans who are communicating with the elves in the empire. Try thinking about it... where are the elves attacking? They aren't really interested nor attached to human society and the empire itself. As a proof, the invaded villages and towns were all destroyed. They don't wish for domination, they only steal. Then, what do they steal?"*

Steal. In other words——

"The national land...?"

Seeing Milifica's expression as she understood, Vint nodded.

"That's right. They take the land, all they do is spreading their territory. And the land doesn't belong just to the empire. All nobles greater than a noble have their own territories. Then, how about this? *It wouldn't be strange if there were people who provide the enemy with information in order to maintain their territory's integrity, people who cooperate with the enemy in exchange for taking territories of the others,* right?"

"You must jest..."

Her lips were trembling. Her vision turned red and her head boiled instantly.

As a princess of the Midgalz Empire, a royal family that had ruled the country, there was nothing more unforgivable than this.

"What a underhanded act, do they really think they'll be able to protect their land! The empire's nobility doing such unworthy things... what a foolish and shameful act!"

Then what kind of boon had the elf given Vint.

Did his father, Marquis Culias know about this? Maybe not only he knows about it, but actually Vint might be moving as a pawn of his father.

But Vint couldn't care less about Milifica's question. The only thing he saw——the only thing he was looking at, rather than his own pride and profit, was just one thing.

"Ahhh, great. Wonderful expression! It's the first time for me to see such anger on your face. I can't bear it. How beautiful... enough to make my soul tremble."

"......!!"

With his ecstatic expression in front of him, her entire body trembled.

Retaining the point of his sword where it was, he extended his left hand towards Milifica's jaw.

His fingertips moved from her chin and traced her lips. The movements were as if he was handling fragile, dead grass. They were full of respect and affection. And therefore, it felt incredibly unpleasant.

"But, Princess. There's something I hate."

While stroking the area by Milifica's eyes, Vint clicked his tongue.

"Actually, the attack on school was scheduled at a later date. At least a month later, when you return to the Imperial City's palace for your highness' birthday ceremony I planned to take a decisive action. Once you've come back you would see all of the campus and schoolmates you love sank deep in the Fairy Country... that was the plan, I wanted to see what kind of expression you'll make then. How-ev-er!"

He grasped her throat.

Then moved his face close enough that their noses almost touched.

Ignoring the fact his spit splashed over her face, his voice roughened as he spoke.

"However, however, how-ev-er! Those travellers! The ones who came to this town yesterday, that filthy man and woman... no, that man! *The expression you showed that man was one I didn't know!* With eyes you haven't shown me you spoke with that man, with an expression you haven't shown me you thought of that man! That can't be, it can't, it should be!"

"With... just that...?"

"Just that? What is 'just that'?! *To me, that is all!*"

"!!....."

She thought it was hideous. The face she was familiar with since young, the voice that had preached her every time she was acting mischievous, the hands she often held until they were around ten.

They could have possibly married at one point and for life, the sigh of a certain person who thought that it might be not so bad if it's him——it was all incredibly, hideous.

"I'm hesitating which one it should be."

And, abruptly, his gentle tone of voice returned.

With a soft coaxing voice as if wanting her mood to improve, and yet he still had a flippant attitude where he couldn't withhold his excitement.

Vint said something terrifying.

"The face as your virginity is taken by me, whom you trusted since young, or the face as your virginity is taken by an ugly and ferocious monster... which pain and despair should I look at, you see."

"Hii..."

Milifica, finally collapsed.

She was acting firm earlier, calm, full of dignity. She had been taught discipline since young after all, although she felt she had strong self-control——that broke.

"No. No... stop."

"Ahh, wonderful! Like a little girl!"

"Please, stop. That's..."

"As I thought, the Ogre! It would be boring with me!"

"NOOOOOOoooo!!"

She was shoved forward with brute force. The usual Milifica would be able to find an opportunity then. However, her body wouldn't listen. She couldn't move because of fear and despair.

"Lord Kuzan, could you?"

The elf watching the situation leaning against the wall nodded with a smile.

"Good grief, some great hobbies you have, don't you... well, I don't mind. I promised to listen to what you say. No matter how barbarous, the nobles of fairy folk keeps their promises."

Wordlessly he shook one hand.

"Also, I don't mind these kind of tasteless events either."

The giant that was looking upwards from the corner growled lowly and with unreserved gait he walked over the classroom's floor, towards her.

"Please be at ease, Princess. That's still a former noble... a same marquis as I am. As for lineage, well, it's not as great as to make a pledge with the royal family."

"No, no...."

She could no longer afford to think what did he mean by saying "a former noble" or "marquis". Shaking her head desperately she tried to crawl backwards, with her legs giving way. But, she couldn't find strength in her legs. She pressed her hands against the floor and slipped away.

The Ogre moved right in front of her.

"Hii....iiii!!"

Instinctively nausea had welled up from the back of her chest, she turned with her back to it and

tried to get away on all fours.

"Ohhh, Princess wishes to take it from behind?"

She ignored Vint's scummy remark and tried to crawl towards her beloved sword that was lying ahead of her. She struggled to reach it. Three more metres and she could reach it. If she has it then, there's still——.

Before she could reach it, a force she couldn't resist had grasped Milifica's arm.

"NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOo!!"

Forcibly pulled, her body was lifted. Her feet separated from the ground.

The pain caused by the fierce grip on her arm, the pain caused by her hanging on one arm, the Ogre's face moved in front of Milifica as she screamed. A smell of decaying flesh assaulted her. A tongue like a huge slug had come out from the mouth that was like a tear from one ear to the other had licked her cheek slowly. It was hideously moist and rasp.

Fingers as thick as a sword's hilt have entered in her chest and pulled down at once.

Sharp nails tore down her uniform and underwear in a straight line down to her waist. Her skin white like a pearl peeked out. The clevage and the gentle curve of her lower abdomen were exposed from the gap in the torn fabric.

Striking her, stronger than shame, was overwhelming fear and despair.

——It's already over.

In order to perform her last resort, Milifica desperately suppressed her chattering teeth.

Let's bite my tongue and die.There's no other hope for me.

She put her tongue between her front teeth. How much strength should I put in it. No, there's no need to think about that. I just need to bite through with all my strength——.

She decided, and the moment she was about to change that into the action.

clank.

After a dull shock, Milifica's body lightly swayed.

What was that. She opened her closed eyes dazedly——then wide open.

A sword that had a colour of blood had shallowly pierced the Ogre's back.

With addition of Sashtal and others, five of them, they headed towards the classroom they thought Milifica would be in.

Along the way they defeated three magical beasts and two demons and allow four students who were hiding to escape, still, that took them about ten minutes. When they were about ten metres away from the classroom they were aiming for, they accelerated and at the same time, a scream could be heard from the doors that were left open.

Everyone paled and rushed at full speed, none of them dared to wait for others.

The first one to reach was Imina.

And with that sight in front of him——Imina lost himself.

The demon's back.

It was big enough to cause him to look up at, enlarged muscles, rugged black skin, mane like a putrid wire on its back.

It was an Ogre.

And it held a single woman, hanging.

Holding her crudely by arm, it lifted her in front of its face.

From behind the torn clothes in the front, white, soft and fair skin had peeked out pitifully.

A long creepy tongue had ran down her cheek.

That face, licked over——that girl.

She looked incredibly similar to his sister.

All of it overlapped with four years ago. An Ogre trying to rape a woman. A woman on verge of being raped. The face of his family dyed with despair. Imina's heart once again, turned back to four years ago.

"...OOOOoOOooOoOOoOOOOOOOAAAAAAAAaAaAaAAAAA!!!"

Whether he really did cry out, he didn't know himself. Something had burst in the back of his head, the sound had disappeared.

His throat turned dry instantly, his body tried to arbitrarily puke, but anger and hatred boiling in his chest made that hardly a problem. His limbs moved painfully forward. The sword he held felt like it responded with heat, he kicked off the floor in a hurry so strongly his backbone vibrated.

Leaping, he pierced the Ogre's shoulder.

"Imina, don't! It still isn't..."

Ellis tried to restrain him from behind.

In the silence, her voice as the only one I could hear clearly. That's right——Ellis worries about me at all times . That's why, she's the only one whose voice I cannot miss.

I know what she wants to say. There isn't enough power accumulated in the blade, right? Actually, the cut was shallow. Even if it can cut the Ogre's skin, it cannot cut apart the bone and muscles. I know. I know it all. But, *I can't stop.*

The Ogre's careless swing had struck Imina's body.

That too, was the same as four years ago. He was blown away by a tremendous impact he couldn't resist. Four years ago he destroyed the wall and rolled outside. Because of the damage to his internal organs he vomited blood and couldn't stand up. The result was, that he lost his family forever. Then, will it end with the same result this time as well?

Screw you. It won't go the same.

The difference——starts here.

Before his body clashed into the wall and fell to the floor, Imina grasped the state of his body.

Bones——two ribs broken. Internal organs——non-fatal. Sword——still in his hand. Blade ——glowing. In that instant, he received the blade's cleave with the blade. He did it almost unconsciously. However, it was unquestionably the result of training and brushing against death for four years, the outcome of his obsession.

It was fortunate that the blade didn't pierce in too deeply. He wouldn't be able to pull it out otherwise.

"GUoo, Aa?"

Turning around Ogre looked at Imina's face and for some reason, it groaned tilting his head.

Immediately after that,

"...gii-AOOoouuUWOuoOOuoo!"

Letting out a crazy cry, he threw away Milifica and headed towards Imina.

"Tch... *he still has some memory from when he was a human!*"

The one who spat that in annoyance was Vint Culias who stood next to the Ogre. With those words, Imina realized what was he doing here and understood who the Ogre originally was. After considering that, he understood.

Imina checked the light in the blade. The accumulated amount was slightly too low to cut an Ogre in two. To receive another blow, or maybe store force while attacking. Considering his own injuries he chose the latter and held the sword in one hand.

And then, he sensed someone's presence standing beside him.

After just glancing there, he frowned.

"...Fream?"

The big-bodied man held his magical spear.

His hand was trembling. Even so, he stood firm and glared at the Ogre, put strength into his feet,

"Come on! RAAhhh!"

While clenching the trigger installed on the handle, he rushed in.

The concentrated spirit energy was poured into the engine part from the spirit energy tube. The evocation engraved grasped the spirit energy's attribute and manifested a force corresponding to it.

A blue flame had blown from the blade——a flame-type evocation.

Coincidentally, four years ago Lakshus' scimitar was clad in a similar one. Back then it had an insufficient amount of destructive force to even cut through the Ogre's skin. The flame only burned the surface.

But this time it was different. Fream's body also held quite a lot of strength and above all, he knew how to handle both a spear and the evocation, he had been firmly taught about it.

His aim was the Ogre's face. To be precise, his eye.

The spear's range was wide, a thrust could be used to attack the enemy over the shortest distance. There was no need to use force to wound the enemy. Just using the flame the spear was clad in,

"Gg-uooomMmu?!"

And even if only temporarily, steal the enemy's vision.

The flame extended itself to the Ogre's face. Rather than to cut down the enemy with the flame, the user left the flame *behind* in the place they wanted——that was the original method of using flame-type evocation.

"R-R-Rr-Representative! Are you all right?!"

While the Ogre was surprised, Laimi used the chance to run over. She almost tumbled because of the momentum and threw herself towards Milifica. Covering her chest with her own jacket, Laimi raised and embraced Milifica.

"Your wounds... ahh, get a hold of yourself!"

"Lai...mi... was it? You, why."

"Ahh, your hand... what shall we do...!"

Seeing as the arm grasped by the ogre was broken, Laimi was upset.

A figure had appeared behind those two.

"You, how about you don't get in my way?"

It was Vint. He held a rapier with expression full of rage, he was full of murderous intent.

"Princess' expressions of confusion and relief are mine! They aren't something for a lowly woman like you to see, I won't forgive it!"

The point of his rapier had approached to gouge Laimi's neck. She made a blank look, unable to react.

But the rapier didn't reach her, it danced in the air.

The one who did it was Sashtal. He entered from the side and flipped up the rapier with his dagger.

Vint's movements stopped at this unexpected attack. For Sashtal who did it, that was the opportunity he waited for.

"Geez... what a shame, colleague."

Acting frivolously until the end, with sadness mixed in his pupils, Sashtal turned his dagger around and bashed Vint's head with the hilt that had no blade.

"Ghh.."

And Vint fell unconscious unable to respond.

While looking at the body slowly collapsing to the floor, Sashtal muttered.

"You see, I quite liked you."

And, beside him——Imina leaped.

The light residing in the one-handed sword wasn't enough to cut the Ogre's body in two. But there should be no problem as long as it's cutting off his head. And now, as the opponent fell on its knees deprived of sight, his head drooped as if waiting for death sentence.

While holding the sword, Imina looked at the drill students just for an instant.

He admired them inside his heart. Earlier, he thought they were merely spectators.

In fact, when they were coming here meeting demons and magical beasts, Imina defeated them all alone. Sashtal and others only admired it.

But, they weren't just watching. They were observing and preparing themselves——so that during the emergency rescue of Milifica they know how to move themselves.

Although he thought of them as of people blinded by peace, he had to amend his thinking. Speaking of which, Milifica's swordsmanship skill was very high. It wasn't just because of her talent. In the first place, all the students trained a lot. However, they never actually fought against monsters, suddenly thrown into combat they were confused and couldn't demonstrate what they learned.

Once they find their courage and move, this degree of cooperation was easy for them.

"Thanks."

He muttered a silent thanks, towards Sashtal, towards his sword——towards Ellis, and towards himself.

Four years ago it was the same nightmare. But, everything was unlike four years ago after all.

Milifica wasn't killed, Imina had power to slay the enemy and there other people helping him who held the same purpose——."

The sword swung down had cut off the Ogre's head.

2

Laimi, who embraced Milifica.

Fream, whose legs gave out in front of the Ogre's corpse.

Sashtal, overlooking unconscious Vint.

Imina saluted them in his heart, and then towards the classroom's corner——he turned his sight towards the man who stood on the sidelines, leaning against the wall.

He realized his presence in the middle of combat with the Ogre. He could only spare time to glance at him and left him out for the time being. Now, he finally turned towards that person to see his face.

Tall and slim, he had silvery-blue hair extending to his neckline, white skin suitable for lurking in the forest, strangely-ordered face as well a pair of ears pointed like needles. Of course, he was an elf. He knew that he was an elf right from the beginning. There was no way the mastermind manipulating demons and magical beasts wouldn't be one.

But, his face.

Same as four years ago, facial features that made it seem like he's nervous and a smile that looked sadistically.

And, his attitude.

Same as four years ago, the horrible act of trampling and playing around with human head ——.

At that time it was a head of his neighbour, Roffen. Now, it was head of a female student Imina didn't know.

"You are..."

He knew.

Imina knew——*he knew this man.*

"Hmm?"

The elf raised his eyebrows feeling Imina's line of sight.

"Have I met you somewhere before?"

At the question, Imina unconsciously leaked a murderous smile.

"...I see. So you forgot, my face."

For an instant, something pitch black boiled inside his heart. The pain had coursed through his entire body's vessels and nerves, like hatred. But his head was cold. It must have been thanks to focusing his passion on the Ogre earlier. Although ironic, it might have been a good fortune. If he surrendered to this impulse, he might just assault the elf at any time.

"I won't forget. As I'd forget."

They only met once four years ago, Imina had grown quite a bit too, but still.

Even now, Imina remembered all of their faces and names.

There were signs of someone moving beside Imina from behind.

It was Ellis. She too, must have noticed after seeing his face.

"Nn?"

The elven man made a puzzled expression. Ahead of his line of sight stood Ellis.

She stood right next to Imina and took off the hood she was wearing. She also took off the cloak and threw it away, and then——she untied her hair, revealing her hidden ears.

"What...?!!"

Sashtal and others gasped behind them.

Ellis Endveil——the elf girl had fixed her gaze at the man and spoke.

"It's been a while, Kuzan-san."

"This is... oh my."

The man's expression changed into one of astonishment.

He forced himself to calm, blinked exaggeratedly and spoke in a tone that suggested he couldn't believe it.

"Lady Ellis, you... Princess was here too?"

"Prin...cess, he said?"

A murmur had come from behind. It was Sashtal's.

"Then, that girl."

Stunned, Laimi continued.

"She's... elven royalty?"

Ellis quietly took a breath and then spoke.

While the elven man——Kuzan and humans——Sashtal and others have collected themselves in middle of confusion, she had closed her eyes, shook her head and moved her lips.

"No."

Opening her eyes wide, she clung to Imina gripping his hand tightly and,

"I am no longer the Endveil Khan household's daughter. I'm Imina's family, who is right here. Just a single woman who fights by his side. ...*the enemy of elves, one who'll take revenge upon them.*"

Harbouring strong will in her voice, she declared so.

"I see... so that's how it was."

The one who made an understanding smile after a while, was Kuzan.

The smile was soon tinged with colour of ridicule,

"The Princess that had gone missing during the invasion on the border four years ago... when someone asked Lord Khan about it, he only answered with "think of her as of dead" and he also said that you won't come back, but to think it was such a thing! Of all things, to think you fell for a human and eloped with him!"

And his mouth spoke words depreciating Ellis.

"In that case, you must be from that time! Right, I remember now, the child who pathetically faced against an Ogre... hahaha, this is interesting! Do other members of "Six Petals" and Lord Khan know of this?"

Confronting him, Ellis glared at Kuzan.

"Who cares about that... yes, I don't care about such a thing."

Passion entered her tone of voice. Her strength as she held Imina's hand had gotten stronger up to the point it hurt.

With tone that could either be anger or determination, she said.

"I am already your enemy, after all."

"...hmm, is that so. It's inevitable then."

Malice dwelled in Kuzan's smile.

With his mind full of neurotic sadism, he made a distinctive expression.

"Let's decide what to do with you after I slaughter all the humans."

A chill. Thirst for blood had spread from his body.

It felt like a bottomless pit of might, a completely alien atmosphere from that of a human being.

Imina let go of Ellis hand, while she fell behind, he moved in front.

Fire filled his chest. The light from when he saw this guy's face, the surge when Ellis untied her hair, when Kuzan recalled Imina the flame had gained momentum.

"It seems like you recalled who I am."

Imina was grateful in the back of his heart. He didn't think he would find an opportunity so quickly. He didn't expect one to come.

"*Endveil clan's member*... Kuzan Demiendveil."

One of the people who burned his home village was in front of him.

The revenge for the villagers, Lakshus, family, his mother and sister was in front of him.

His——Shirjis' subordinate was right in front of him——.

The name of the flame that filled his chest was, hatred.

The name of the boiling heat was, resentment.

What burned his body, was in short, *ecstasy.*

"Indeed."

Facing Imina's spirit, Kuzan responded proudly as if it was nothing.

"My name is Kuzan Demiendveil. Endveil clan's Demi branch family's eldest son. A single petal of the proud "Six Petals" that decorate the clan."

"Yeah, I know. I'm happy to meet you again."

These four years, Imina always yearned for it.

The reason he continued to train muffled up in the mountains after being saved by Ellis, was all for this.

In order to kill these guys, he devoted everything he had.

Holding a sword, he lowered his body on his knees.

"Meeting you again is really great fortune. There's a much greater worth killing you than normal elves. While reminding you of that day, four years ago... making you regret, I'll kill you."

He shouted, his voice twisted by thirst for blood.

"First, I'll stop you from playing with the corpses using your feet!!"

Imina leaped.

There was a smile on his face.

If there was anyone seeing it, they would call it cruel and oppressive, as well as tragic.

Milifica Yusala Astozellen bit her lips as she was embraced by Laimi.

Her right arm, crushed by the Ogre was aching badly. The meat was squashed, bones broken, possibly it might not return to how it was before. However, rather than the pain caused by the injury, it was the battle unfolding in front of her what made her focus and to stare in wonder. The sight was irresistibly touching, causing pain in her chest to a helpless extent.

Ever since yesterday she wondered all this time, what was it that Imina was looking at.

The boy who was outside of the narrow world Milifica was living in. His eyes looking towards somewhere far away, in a different place from hers.

Her life as a member of royal family was stifling, not satisfied with just wielding the sword, Milifica craved for something of unknown identity. She had a feeling that the thing he was looking at was what she desired.

Arbitrarily, she thought *that* must be something brilliant and wonderful.

Selfishly——she convinced herself.

"UOOOoOoo!"

Imina swung his sword to slash Kuzan.

"Ha!"

Kuzan let a short laughter, avoided by a hair's breadth and counter-attacked with his fist.

He mercilessly pierced Imina's side, blowing him away with powerful momentum. The elf has already subjected himself to biological necromancy increasing both his muscle strength and speed, deviating significantly from human's common sense.

"Khh... gah!"

What he clashed into, were the seats in circle. The desks and chairs broke with a loud sound. Standing up after the dust cleared up, Imina rushed again. This time he cleaved from low

posture.

The enemy responded with a kick. He aimed sharply at the Imina's head.

Imina tried to immediately defend with the swords side but,

"Oho."

As if coming up with something, Kuzan stopped his leg in mid-air and jumped backwards, outside of range.

"If I'm not wrong, that sword is clad in strange evocation... it appears that the impact that hits the blade is converted into destructive power, is that right?"

"You think I'd tell you?!"

A pursuit after a quick shout and,

"Well, in any case, let's avoid carelessly touching it."

He held someone's corpse lying under his feet and threw it.

In the shade of flying corpse, he once again entered from a blind spot.

As Imina tried to brush away the corpse, at the very same moment his body was hit and blown away.

"...ghh!"

This time, he slammed into the blackboard next to the teacher's desks.

Imina rolled by the corpses on the floor. Droplets of blood spilled as he coughed. And yet——as blood overflowed from his mouth, his lips distorted. They distorted into a smile.

The sword he held in his hand let out a pale glow.

"Hmm, so it *accumulates* even with that level of impact."

"RAAAaaAa!!"

Instead of answering Imina rushed once again. In response, Kuzan entered a martial arts' stance.

"You don't get tired of it, do you."

Kuzan's dynamic vision acuity must have been enhanced by organic necromancy as well. He easily avoided the sword cutting straight at him and swung his fist accurately.

clack. A dull sound of a bone fracturing resounded in the classroom.

But——unlike the earlier punches, Imina wasn't blown away.

He lowered his body the moment the impact came and the only thing he had held out was his arm. For compensation, his left arm was punched and dislocated diagonally.

As his upper body pulled after the blown away arm——Imina's eyes were coloured with tenacity. Using the momentum of that, he cleaved in a manner similar to a roundhouse kick.

"Ngh!"

The colour of Kuzan's face finally changed. Since swung his fist diagonally, he couldn't fix his posture. The shining magical sword had flashed towards his open flank.

But the reaction rate enhanced by organic necromancy had surpassed Imina's full-body attack.

On the brink of entering in contact with the blade Kuzan jumped backwards. Despite his body posture collapsing completely, overusing his enhanced leg muscles and reaction time outside of common sense he managed to successfully escape.

On the other hand, Imina stepped in with surplus momentum and fell to his knees.

"Woah, dangerous."

Kuzan leaked out a sigh of relief,

"...ha!"

But Imina laughed with ridicule.

"Hm, what's up? Did you finally understand you can't win and go crazy?"

"No that... it's the opposite."

Kuzan's clothes were cut apart, a red line flowed in the gap——there was a cut on his muscles.

"So you grazed me. But, what about it?"

"My sword can reach you. I have proven that."

"...what are you saying?"

The elf made a puzzled expression.

Seeing this fight, Milifica's heart shrunk.

Of course, it wasn't because of Kuzan, but because of Imina.

He said.

"If it reaches you once, the second one will reach deeper. And then the third and fourth time. I'll repeat it... and before long, I'll cut down your head, right?"

Joyfully——yeah, how to describe this.

He said so, *happy from the bottom of his heart.*

Imina felt fresh blood in his mouth. Of course, some of his internal organs and multiple bones were broken. His left arm was dangling loosely. He was no longer in a state to hold a sword.

Surely, his arm must have been in state worse than Milifica's. With just one arm like this she showed this appearance. *And yet, he was smiling broadly.*

Rather than care about his own injuries, he was in ecstasy that his sword reached the enemy ——.

Milifica had become keenly aware just how shallow and a spoiled child she was.

Even though she sought *something* so strongly she couldn't care less about her position as a princess.

Even though what was ahead his sight was that *something* she was sought.

Even though she had arbitrarily thought this *something* is brilliant and wonderful.

It was no joke——*this*, isn't such a sweet and naive thing.

The darkness instead of brilliance. The impulse to destroy that satisfies his heart. What he gazed at, was death.

The place he was in was tragic beyond imagination, so gruesome she was unable to imagine it.

She's not supposed to embrace admiration for that. It would be rude towards his determination.

Yeah, and yet.

And yet, still.

The path he trod so far was stained with blood, cursed, tragic, dark, this gruesome journey—— she thought of it as of something incredibly noble and sacred.

She moved her line of sight towards Ellis who was watching over Imina from behind.

She was not a human, but an elf. Moreover, apparently an elven princess. And it seemed like she had abandoned her position in order to accompany Imina.

Milifica felt no anger towards her for faking her identity. Judging from the situation, she didn't think Ellis was an enemy. That's why, what Milifica felt towards her was pure envy.

A princess——coincidentally Ellis' circumstances were the same as Milifica's own, and yet Ellis threw it all to the winds choosing to walk by Imina's side. She had seen something better in Imina, *it went to the extent that she couldn't care less about her own position as a princess.* Turning this around to look at herself, was Milifica able to make the same choice? The country, her identity, her responsibilities, would she be able to throw them away to walk the path she believed in? Even more so, that she understood the path was covered with thorns.

Milifica had no idea who will fall during this match. Whether Imina will fall on the due course, or will he make a comeback victory. But regardless of the outcome, probably today had marked the end of Milifica as a young girl. Imina's rapture was a rite of passage to her.

Just as his surname indicated, Kuzan Demiendveil was born into the Endveil clan.

Endveil was one of the sixteen fairy clans. It's previous khan, Eiisu was the previous king of the country, in other words, held a position as the king of elves.

He and the Fairy Country together had a policy of coexisting with humans. The forest of the elves was in the north-eastern end of the continent——they were living quietly in the Fairy Country. Humans didn't intrude in their country, elves also didn't go to the human villages without a good reason. There was practically no exchange between them. So until then, things have generally gone well and the world was in peace.

——However, there was someone who fell bored with it.

No, there were many who have gotten bored with it, or so he thought.

After all, Radiaata, the Khan of the Lilithgrave clan, was crowned the king of Fairy Country along with Eiisu's death and she had announced the invasion of Midgalz——there were incredibly few who opposed it.

Of course, Radiaata must have been working behind the scenes politically. She suppressed the dissidents and silenced everyone. Kuzan's opinion on them was simple, "They are in favour of it from the bottom of their hearts". After all, in the end, everyone participated in the war.

Kuzan was surprised that Shirjis, who had become the new Khan had announced their participation in the invasion as the first ones. He thought Shirjis will want only to coexist with humans like his father. But, the result was completely opposite——using them, the "Six Petals" who were the vanguard he had invaded the neighbouring village, Salaido.

"Six Petals" were a set of six people, the Endveil clan's elite. They were a set of villains but their were the best, there were very few who could compare to them even in the other clans. And Kuzan too, was one of the "Six Petals".

In any case, he admired Shirjis' rapid judgement. Although it was exaggerated to call taking over a small village like Salaido as invasion, the Endveil clan obtained the honour for the first strike and acquired a strong position under the Lilithgrave's ruler. Their military glory gained momentum and they were entrusted with the capture of the Great Astozellen Fortress on the front-line.

If they continue piling up feats of valour, when Radiaata dies the future where Shirjis becomes the king of the Fairy Country might not be just a dream. That's how Kuzan discerned it.

Although, there were shadows even on their brilliant military glory.

One of them——was the boy that was right at this moment resisting Kuzan and the elf girl watching over him.

Especially, Ellis Endveil.

As opposed to her older brother, Shirjis, who with an impressive decision had led the clan's vanguard for the invasion, the little sister apparently chose to coexist with humans. As if shouldering her father's dying wish alone, she discarded her own birthplace and brethren.

Kuzan had no intention to blame her for that decision. The reason she decided so must have been because she opposed the invasion from the bottom of her heart. There were people who continued to shout and cry that they oppose it, but in the end they have reluctantly participated, compared to those guys who have gotten passionate over getting accomplishments despite that, she was much more courageous.

No——let's face it honestly.

Blaming her would be absurd. Rather, he was overjoyed that she rebelled.

To be precise, that missing Ellis Endveil had reappeared.

In addition, her elder brother and Endveil clan's khan had declared "think of her as of dead".

Furthermore, Kuzan being here was a cover operations close to being called an unauthorized action. With Great Astozellen Fortress' capture warfare in a stalemate, he thought of attacking the enclave from behind and took Vint Culias' invitation. In other words, he was the only elf here. The only one who knew she was alive and well, was only he, himself.

Therefore, even if he cornered Ellis here, no one will blame him.

And by cornering her, *he might witness and ascertain what Ellis' evocation was*——.

"By the way, Princess, are you not going to help him?"

He artificially asked looking behind the human boy——towards the Princess who stood behind Imina.

"The battle situation is unfavourable for you. No, not just unfavourable... the only possibility is my victory. In other words, unless you fight, he, and everyone else here will die. And thus, this town will be swallowed by the forest turning into an enclave of Fairy Country."

It was a provocation, an invitation.

"However, if you help them, your chances will increase. No matter how far you are from the Fairy Country, you are the daughter of the Endveil clan's khan household. There's no way you don't hold a powerful 'Unique Vocation'!"

Elven biological necromancy was poorly organised, unlike human inorganic necromancy.

That's because elves are capable of intuitively interfere with the spirit energy flowing through the earth with their own bodies. One of the systems they knew were the various physical enhancements and the method of generating the "Seeds" for creating Corpse Seeds of Origin. In general, humans believe that body enhancement is all there is to biological necromancy but——to the elves, that's basics of basics, it equals to walking on two legs.

The essence of the living necromancy starts there. The individual evocation characteristic 'Unique Vocation'.

That's an evocation characteristic, a talent one is born with and that determines the forte in dealing with spirit energy. And the 'Unique Vocation' is a special evocation using one's unique characteristics.

For example, being good at manipulating bodies, for example high efficiency in spirit energy consumption, for example, being good at manipulating Corpse Seeds, for example——by applying their characteristics in a complex manner, one achieves feats that cannot be imitated by others.

However, in the elven society, revealing what is one's evocation's characteristic is considered something one doesn't reveal lightly. It was the nature one was born with, revealing it meant exposing the one's soul's profile to public attention.

Of course, it wasn't like everyone necessarily wants to keep it secret. Among Unique Vocations there are powerful ones, as well as rare and valuable characteristics. Those with such Unique Vocation are granted Unique Name from the elders, it was a great honour for the elves.

And——most likely Ellis Endveil was a holder of an Unique Name.

This is one of the reasons for which the clans have main house and the branches. Almost without exception all born into the Khan household are born with a talent worthy of being given an "Unique Name".

There were very few who knew what are their Unique Vocations. Talking about was shameless and prying was rude.

However, it was wartime. They cannot win the war while trapped in the old customs. Even more so *that she had sided with humans*.

"I... no, majority doesn't know what kind of Unique Vocation you have. But, it definitely isn't something weak, right? It's not like you can't use it, right? So just use it. Then just show me your unique evocation!"

I want to see. I want to see Ellis' evocation.

He wanted to see the true nature of this girl, who since young had a personality with which she couldn't build relations with anyone.

There was curiosity inside him, intellectual craving, and above all - a common lust.

When elves show their own Unique Vocation, or see the Unique Vocations of others they feel certain embarrassment. The pleasure from showing it off and peeking at others who show it are two sides of the same coin. Kuzan——even more so than others had believed in this.

The Princess' Unique Vocation might be first-class wine that appears only once every three hundred years——.

"If you don't use it, you will lose. You don't have a grace of not using it! You shouldn't be able to afford to act shy about using it!"

Hiding the desire behind his enigmatic, mocking attitude he repeated provocation after provocation.

However——Ellis still wouldn't move.

Silent she peered at Imina's back, not sparing Kuzan even a glance.

"Tch..."

Kuzan received her attitude as arrogant. He felt that she was looking down upon him.

He got irritated, felt his pride was hurt. One reason for that was because he himself, was one of those whose Unique Vocation was granted an "Unique Name".

My Unique Vocation isn't being even feared as a threat. Even though it's so amazing. Even though it was excellent enough to be granted an Unique Name. *Even though I'm really desperate to show it off.*

Maybe her "Unique Vocation" is nothing great? Maybe she doesn't have an Unique Name that's a common characteristic for those born in the Khan household. Rather than not wanting to use it, she feels there's no meaning to using it——in that case, it's a disappointment.

"Fine. I'll make you regret taking on that attitude."

Declaring he's had enough, Kuzan made a cruel smile.

He pulled out strength from his entire body, focused his senses on the depths of his soul. Spirit energy flowing in the earth, the spirit energy shaking in the atmosphere, spirit energy flowing into himself - he perceived it all in great detail and connected them all into one. The flow of spirit energy turned enormous——and with a similar effect to that of human's engraved evocation, he added directivity to the spirit power he was born with. The spirit power flowed and spread in his body, and then.

"My Unique Evocation——'Differ and Howl'. Look carefully, fight your fear, and die."

He weaved the evocation only he could use.

"......!!"

Confronting him, Imina gasped.

"Wha...!!" "Heyy." "No... way." "Can't be..."

The humans watching the battle from behind had amazed and terrified expressions.

Kuzan couldn't get enough of it. The reason for that, was because his evocation——his Unique Vocation "Differ and Howl"——his own body was being stared at.

In other words, a physical change.

He had a characteristic that allowed him to flexibly manipulate his own body's spirit energy. Because a body was a vessel for spirit energy, if likened to an actual vessel, a human body would be brittle ceramics and an elves' would be an unbreakable wooden bowl.

On the other hand, Kuzan's body was like a leather bag.

Therefore, he was capable of freely manipulating his skeleton, appearance and age. Others at most are limited to manipulating places like arms and legs, at most they can assume a particular facial profile. Those who were poor at changing their bodies couldn't change anything at all.

It was convenient to use as a disguise. Ever since yesterday until today he was disguised as a human being called Shishirii, he was capable of changing into the same form as his target.

However, this was just one application. The essence of this power was different.

"Ghh, ...oo-AA-aa-A..."

Together with his spine's engorgement, a voice leaked from his throat. His chest expanded threefold, greatly enhancing his lung capacity, his torso's muscles have also thickened.

Next, his both legs changed. His thighs expanded and stiffened, lower legs warped becoming suitable for running and jumping, taking a shape similar to that a horse's legs had.

Both his arms used a snake as a reference. They were reconstructed into a twelve joints. The supple muscles could stretch like a whip, five of his fingers had fingertips sharp like a sword's blade.

His face turned into that of a bird. With a sharp bearded beak he had his eyes placed on the sides of his head, thus obtaining a wide field of view in a band shape. Additional optical nerves were added to his eyes. He grew photoreceptor cells to enhance his vision, making the vision reflected by his eyes perfectly clear. He didn't miss a single scattered grain of dust.

After changing the respective sections, he fine-tuned the entire body.

He changed the length of his limbs to move easier, increased the density of his hip bone to fix his centre of gravity and increase stability, bent his back forward to make it easier to attack.

This appearance——Kuzan had arrived at it after a countless repeat of trial and error, perfect shape for combat. While the prototype for it was a magical beast, a griffon, he was tougher, more agile, more ominous, more beautiful. Of course, although griffon was a prototype, they're essentially different. Magical beasts and demons are a result of oversupply of spirit energy to the bodies of animals and humans, their bodies are destroyed and a mere shadow of their former selves. On the other hand, for Kuzan, it's just his vessel's form changing appearance and he is in no way impaired. Spirit energy is running throughout his body in a healthy manner. His mentality isn't influenced and he doesn't lose his reason.

"You must be... joking..."

The one who muttered that in daze, was one of the humans in the back.

Kuzan laughed.

"Ku-keke. It certainly is is no joke."

In other words, their fear was his own, proud pleasure. The more they looked at him frightened, the more joyful and ecstatic Kuzan was inside.

Now——from here on, let's paint this joy and ecstasy with blood and screams.

He put strength into his legs and sank low in a fraction of a second.

Kicking off the floor, Kuzan bounced at Imina.

"......!!!"

Imina was able to react thanks to good fortune. Maybe because of his cultivated reflexes, he tried to prevent the attack using his one-handed sword as a shield. Speaking of which, this sword absorbed shock and converted it into light of destruction, hasn't it. Until just earlier I tried not to touch it, but——well, I don't care now. No matter how much power can that sword store, the user is ultimately just a fragile human. Once he breaks the human, there will be no problems.

After decreasing the distance at once Kuzan let out a strike using his right arm like a whip.

"Ga-ha...!"

"You blocked direct hit with a sword? ...so what about it."

He probably didn't hear Kuzan's mockery.

Imina's body shot through the air like a cannonball, crashed into the classroom's wall——and breaking through it he was blown into another classroom.

3

As Imina penetrated through the wall and fell on the other side, deformed Kuzan Demiendveil started walking slowly.

There was no signs of Imina moving. Possibly because of injuries, or maybe he lost consciousness, was waiting while pretending to be too wounded to move, or lost his life in that blow.

Withstanding the loud and fast beating of her heart, Ellis watched over the entire flow.

Kuzan said that she should use her evocation.

Her Unique Evocation——that she should show her own Unique Vocation.

The reason she didn't take his invitation wasn't because she didn't want to show it. It wasn't due to sense of shame. *It was because she hasn't received permission yet.*

"...Imina."

Gripping her hands in front of her chest, she muttered as if praying.

"Please."

It's not like she was praying to a god. Ellis no longer believed in the sixteen pillars of sacred

teachings of the Fairy Folk. She discarded all, her religion, her homeland, her family. On top of that she had dedicated all of herself to him. That's why, the one she prayed was, to him——to Imina——to her dear and beloved. What she hoped for, was that he stands up and achieves victory. And, that standing in front of her again, he'll pat her head with a smile.

——About four years ago.

Ellis committed two sins, as a result, Imina was wounded deeply.

One of them, was the sin of not knowing anything.

That the new ruler, Radiaata tried to start an invasion on the human country, that her brother decided to also participate in the invasion, that he served as a vanguard and destroyed Salaido, she didn't know anything. She wasn't informed of it. It all happened while Ellis was mourning her father, they decided to leave Ellis behind and execute it.

At some point she realized that her brother and "Six Petals" were gone and was puzzled seeing the Fairy Country's state, thinking it can't be, she rushed towards Salaido. But before she arrived, it was all over. She passed by her brother who returned to the Fairy Country, the village was swallowed and incorporated into the forest, houses were burned down and collapsed, she was too late to do anything. In her ignorance, she was helpless.

"Imina..."

The voice calling his name has gotten louder in accordance with the urgency in her heart.

Kuzan dove into the hole in the wall.

On the other side, Imina's body was buried under the fragments of the destroyed wall.

The snake-like long arms waded through the wreckage to dig him out. Then casually grasped him by the head to lift him up. Imina's arms powerlessly dangled. It was a miracle he barely held onto the sword, or possibly, tenacity.

"Oh, he's breathing."

With a mocking smile, Kuzan threw him again.

Since it wasn't too violent throw, after a single turn in the air he fell on the ground without taking much shock. As Imina passively rolled on the floor, he let out a small groan.

"Oh my, he's even conscious."

As Kuzan exclaimed,

"D-amn it, ..."

Imina raised his head. Sluggishly. His face smeared in blood.

His fractured left arm was badly swollen, it was no longer in state to be used. In that case, possibly all the bones in his body were broken. Some of his internal organs must have been damaged.

Still, his right arm still hasn't stopped clenching the sword's hilt forcefully. His legs trembled strongly wanting to kick off the floor. Despite the fact he was near death, he stood up.

Kuzan stopped his pursuit and looked down at Imina. He didn't try to finish him off. Acting leisurely he invited——invited Ellis to use her evocation.

A voice had come from behind him.

"You monster!! We will take you on next!"

Looking back, Milifica with the same face as Uruha had glared at Kuzan.

She was a holding a sword. Disregarding the fact her right arm was broken, she held a sword in one hand while Sashtal lent her a shoulder, behind her on the sides were Fream and Laimi.

Of course, none of them were capable to hide their terror.

The spear Fream held wouldn't stop trembling, Sashtal made an expression suggesting he was preparing for death, Laimi was crying. Milifica also chewed her lips, probably she desperately endured trying not to let her legs give out.

However, a light of strong will dwelled in their eyes.

"We're Midgalz's proud soldiers. Even if we're drill students, if this is the battlefield, we shall fulfil our responsibility. Since we'll be killed anyway, our choice is to die fighting!"

"Hoho, you're brave."

Deformed looked backwards and formed a grin with his beak.

"Ku-kaka! That too, is amusing... however, you all, you understand don't you? It's admirable to die fighting, but dying with *awareness that you fought bravely is another thing.* If I feel like it, I can open up a hole in your bellies in just one second."

"......nhh."

His words were a fact.

For Kuzan as he is now, it was very easy to kill a human. No matter how much courage they summon, that fact doesn't change.

"St-op..."

"Mm?"

Kuzan who was about to turned around towards Milifica and the others was stopped by Imina's voice.

"I said stop, you dirty elf. Don't touch them."

The restraint wasn't directed just at Kuzan, but also at Milifica and the others.

"You guys too... *don't touch my prey!*"

He raised his sword with uncertain motion, the blood flowing from his forehead wet his cheeks and dripped down,

"This is my fight. Mine, and Ellis' fight. That's why... until the end, I'll do it!"

With ferocious eyes he glared at Kuzan.

"...Imina."

As Ellis throat shook with emotions, Imina turned his line of sight towards her.

Gritting his teeth——a bit feebly, he said.

"Sorry. ...at this rate, it'll be impossible."

"...yes."

"Damn it... it's frustrating, really frustrating."

In other words, his chagrin was,

"This isn't enough. I'm not strong enough. In front of my enemy... I end up like this."

That of someone lamenting his lack of power.

"That's not true."

That's why he shook his head, he endured the tears that gathered in the corners of his eyes.

"You don't have to be concerned about me. So..."

"I'm sorry, Ellis."

"No, it's fine."

She was happy, so happy she couldn't bear it.

That he said "Mine, and Ellis' fight".

That he said "I'm sorry" worrying about her.

And——that he relied on her.

That's why with various thoughts in her head turning into love, Ellis laughed.

"All of myself is yours. So, use me whenever you like, however you like."

That exchange was a confirmation and a request.

Confirmation, *Is it all right to use it?* and "Please use it", the request.

——Yeah, that's right.

If Imina cannot win with just his power, he just has to use Ellis' power.

Ellis' power just has to be used as Imina's power.

With wounds all over his body, he started to walk slowly.

He held out his left arm as he walked.

"...what?"

Kuzan spoke with expectation in his voice.

"Possibly, finally... you'll show it?"

"Indeed."

Ellis nodded. Not sparing the enemy behind her a glimpse, she just looked into Imina's eyes.

"If that's what you want."

——About four years ago.

Ellis committed two sins, as a result, Imina was wounded deeply.

One of them, was the sin of not knowing anything.

And, *the second sin.*

On that day, as Fairy Country's trees grew between burning houses, she frantically ran around what was merely the shadow of the village and finally found fallen Imina.

However, it was in fact already too late. His right arm and left leg were cut off, he was cut through the shoulder to belly, his heart was penetrated. *He was already dead.* There was no heartbeat, he lost large quantities of blood, even his soul was about to be let loose into the spirit pulse.

That's why, Ellis revived it——the body and her beloved person.

With her own evocation.

When Imina woke up, Ellis continued to repeat apologies. I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry. Again and again. She couldn't find any other words.

I'm sorry, I'm sorry for not knowing anything.

I'm sorry, for not stopping Nii-sama.

I'm sorry, for making your body like this——.

Ever since that day, Ellis' atonement began.

Ever since that day, all of Ellis existed for him. From the tip of her hair until the toes of her feet, her smile, her tears, hear anger, her joy, her pain, her wounds, her pleasure, the fluctuation of her spirit energy, the shine of her soul, every single drop of blood flowing through her body, anything and everything of hers was devoted to him.

She gently touched Imina's arm.

The right arm extending from the gap in his jacket was tatted in battle. There was a scar in the middle of his forearm. It looked as if it was once cut and then forcibly joined——no, it was in fact joined back.

Of course, that wasn't all. Hidden under clothing, on the left leg there was a same cut mark as on his right arm. A sword wound from his shoulder to belly. On his left breast there was a puncture wound as if someone mashed a fruit on top of his heart.

Each of the scars was red. On top of the slightly gouged skin, like painted with vivid blood ——deep crimson.

"...what is that wound?"

Kuzan inquired.

"It's not from the fight with me. And it looks too fresh to be an old wound."

"*Evocation.*"

Ellis responded.

"My Unique Vocation... unique evocation. It's Unique Name is 'Crimson-Stained Water Lily'."

In the Fairy Country, a water lily was a metaphor which meant the elven race itself. Dirt and water——born in the dark forest, flower——self-respect for beautifully blooming.

That water lily, was dyed crimson.

The Unique Name given to her by the elders, rather than honourable, was sinister and ominous.

It was natural. Everyone who knew Ellis' characteristics without exception was horrified, frightened, and detested. If the holder that power indiscriminately, a calamity would befall Fairy Country. It was vocation that devours us, your brethren. Therefore, you shall not use it without reason. As a warning we grant you this Unique Name, they said——.

"I'll tell you while at it."

Imina, standing next to Ellis continued.

Raising the crimson blade——the falchion he held in his right hand,

"This sword too, was made with Ellis evocation. It's name is... 'Exellis' meaning 'Blood of Ellis."

"Exellis... you say it's made from Ellis?"

That's right.

The sword Imina used was similar yet different from the "magical swords" humans use.

It's not a vessel for usage of the inorganic necromancy in the first place. The material wasn't

metal either.

It was blood.

Ellis Endveil's elven blood was compressed and solidified in a form of a blade.

"My spiritual characteristic lies in blood."

Blood was a system that had spread the life force while circulating throughout the body. Life force, oxygen, nutrients, and above all, spirit energy. Thus speaking from the spirit energy anatomy's point of view, blood was in charge of taking in the spirit energy and storing the spirit energy. To add it all, blood was in charge of three roles concerning spirit energy.

Ellis' blood had talent for those no other person could match——in other words, *her spirit absorption and storage capacity was several tens of times higher than that of a typical member of fairy folk.*

The evocation using that was "Crimson-Stained Water Lily".

First of all, she healed Imina. Ellis healed his wounds by supplying spirit energy using her own blood as a medium, allowing his heart to resume beating, returning him to life. Normally, humans wouldn't be able to withstand large amounts of spirit energy. However, adding the fact that Imina was already dead and that Ellis' blood which supplied spirit energy also worked directly adjusting spirit energy, the result was——that while he kept the shape and soul of a human, she was able to heal him using evocation.

And, the sword.

Even though it had a shape of a sword, it was actually a lump of blood. Every day Ellis poured blood from her body and using evocation she compressed it in ultra-density, stabilizing it in a solid form. If it was turned back into liquid temporarily, possibly it could fill three or four bathtubs. Therefore it had much tougher and harder properties than a metal. The essence of it, is that it could *accumulate large amounts of spirit energy.*

The accumulated spirit energy turned into a deep crimson light through the evocation engraved on the surface of the sword, in other words, it was converted into destructive force itself. The theory behind it was the one incorporated into the magical swords. The blade itself served as a spirit energy tube and the surface served as an engine converting spirit energy.

However, both the blood in Imina's body and the blood fixed into shape of a sword couldn't display its original performance in this state. The reason was simple, it's because it was outside of Ellis' body. In other words, although it was all created with Ellis' evocation, since she wasn't connected to it with her spirit, it was all working autonomously and she was unable to control it.

Then, to control it——what do they need to do so that it's once again connected spiritually with Ellis.

The blood passed through the organ that is heart and spreads spiritual energy throughout the body. The heart is the source producing spirit energy in the body, and the organic necromancy manipulating spirit energy flow starts with the heart.

"Imina, it's okay."

She stood in front of him, spread her arms and closed her eyes.

"*Return... to me.*"

Imina nodded, stroked Ellis' head with the broken left arm and drew closer to her,

suu——

He overlaid his lips over her lips and,

suu——

And used the crimson sword, "Exellis" to pierce through Ellis' abdomen.

"Wha...?!"

Kuzan, Milifica and the others, everyone gasped.

"What... are you doing?"

Imina didn't respond. His mouth had covered Ellis' mouth and was covered by it.

Their tongues entered in the other's mouth after their lips and teeth moved out of the way.

The taste similar to sweet rust spread in their mouths. Ellis cut her own tongue with her teeth. Imina too, wounded his tongue. The two pressed the wounds on their tongues against each other.

Ellis' blood and Imina's blood mixed together——in other words, *Ellis' spirit energy, through blood had formed a path connecting her with Imina's body.*

It was the same for the sword piercing through her belly.

The blood inside her body had touched the blade. Wetting the surface, flowing into the pattern engraved on it——in other words, *Ellis' spirit energy through blood had formed a path connecting her with the sword.*

Their lips separated, the sword was pulled out.

"Ellis..."

"I'm... all right."

As she wiped the blood at the edge of her mouth, Ellis complexion was pale blue but she still laughed, stout-hearted.

Of course, she immediately sealed the wounds using healing evocation. Even the abdomen pierced through the sword didn't have a single scar left behind. However, the task of connecting the spiritual path between her and Imina as well as maintaining it, had rapidly depleted her physical strength. To say it differently, she continued to pour her life force into Imina and his sword.

"I'll end it quickly. Wait a little bit longer."

He spoke. Only his attitude was calm, only deep in his heart he was worried.

"Yes, thank you. I'll wait."

As she nodded, a joyous smile spilled on her cheeks.

Even though it was difficult, even though it was painful.

It wasn't that she pretended to endure. Probably, she was delighted from the bottom of her heart. Just seeing that he worried about her body was enough to make her happy.

Had this devotion come from pure affection, or maybe it had come from the sense of guilt. Imina didn't know. However, it was tragic and sad, as well as warm.

"What... is that? What is that, what is that, what is that!"

At the same time as Imina turned around to confront him, Kuzan cried a question in delight.

"I never saw anything like that. I never saw an evocation like that! Blood... she said blood? What kind of characteristics does she have in her blood? You two, just now, what on earth did you do? I can feel it by just standing in front of you, even if you stay silent I can feel it... what on earth is this overwhelming spiritual power?!"

"You think I'm kind enough to tell you?"

He wasn't compelled to, nor had any time for that.

While he's standing here the life in Ellis' body is being steadily exhausted.

He needs to finish this before she runs out of breath——.

"Let's go."

Declaring that, he submerged his body and leaped.

"Eh...?!"

The bird's face was distorted with astonishment and agitation. Of course it was. Imina's speed was on another level as compared to before——to a level of an elf that had transformed his body using evocation.

A scooping upwards slash leaving a trace of light in a shape of a sickle had aimed for Kuzan's long, snake-like left arm. That guy had hardened his skin in addition to biological necromancy, using the evocation he had changed the structure itself into that of scales. That's why, he received it without dodging.

Fool, Imina's lips distorted.

Even though the light from the blow he received earlier was still remaining inside.

The sword's light turned into a force of destruction, the parts touched by blade were cut through as if they were made from butter.

In other words, the sword had mercilessly cut off Kuzan's left arm.

"Ba...stard!!"

For the first time after coming here, Kuzan's face displayed rage.

He kicked with his horse legs. Imina raised his left arm.

Until just earlier it was in a horrible condition with bones broken and crushed meat, but it was already healed——when Ellis connected a path with his body, it was completely healed.

No, far from being just healed, *it was also strengthened.*

His left arm had openly received Kuzan's kick from the front.

"Kh...?!!"

The impact was tremendous. His entire body sunk low and the lecture room's floor groaned. Still, Imina wasn't blown away. He only retracted a dozen centimetres.

The bird's beak distorted in astonishment. It can't be, is what his face said.

That's right——right now, Imina's reflexes, vision, muscle strength, dynamic vision acuity, regeneration, have all leaped beyond that of humans. Of course, it didn't go as far as Kuzan's who remade his entire body, but including his experience with sword Imina was capable of competing with Kuzan.

All of it, through Ellis' blood.

Four years ago, when she repaired his various body parts, she used her own blood to join them. Since it was separated from Ellis body the blood remained dormant, normally not affecting

Imina in any way.

However, with her re-connecting the spiritual path with it and opening the spirit pulse, the blood resumed its activity and "Crimson-Stained Water Lily's" characteristic was exhibited. Ellis blood melded with Imina's blood vessels, spirit energy was absorbed from the atmosphere and spread to the limbs, thus performing pseudo-organic necromancy on Imina.

And the evocation led to one visual change——.

The moment he received the attack.

plap.

With a sound as if something burst, sparks were scattered from Imina's body.

The dark thing similar to lightning was ionized spirit energy mingled with blood. Ellis excessive spirit energy crawled out of the body leaking on his body surface. The scars from four years ago——the heart, the torso, the right arm and leg. It ejected from those places like geysers, wrapping around and sticking to Imina's body.

"What... is that?!"

The sparks were an aftermath after a body movement, so it wasn't something like an attacking evocation that splashed in order to attack. But Kuzan was still wary.

Imina smiled fearlessly.

When the enemy is wary, opening appear. Since the attack that was supposed to be deadly was received, the opponent stiffened. Imina didn't miss that.

Since he slashed with the sword earlier, there was no light on the blade. That's why he moved to accumulate it. The "Exellis" that was stopped in the posture of swinging now was swung down in a turning swallow cut.

"Nughh...!!"

Even if he had a figure of a monster defying human common sense, it was impossible for Kuzan to avoid. He defended himself with his right arm, blade did not pass through it. However, along with the impact, **bam**. The sword once again began to emit red light.

"Tch!"

After receiving it, Kuzan finally leaped away. He opened a large distance between them.

"Explain this."

The beak-face distorted with astonishment and pain.

Despite the brief exchange his breathing turned rough.

"Wound's healing, as well as movements that transcend human's, that mysterious spirit light too... it looks just like organic necromancy... our, elves' technique, doesn't it!"

"Indeed.'

Imina nodded while measuring the distance.

"This is Ellis' unique evocation... in your language it's Unique Vocation, wasn't it?"

As expected of an elf, to discern that the sparks emitted from Imina's body are spirit light. However, it doesn't seem like his understanding extended that far. Of course, Imina had no intention of explaining.

"Do your best, watching with those monster's eyes. Struggle with that monster's arm. Bounce around with those monster's legs. Breathe with that monster's throat. I can keep up with all of it now. And..."

He submerged his waist low again,

"Before long, I'll overtake you!"

Leaping upwards this time, he cut straight down holding the sword in both hands.

"Kh....keh!"

Impatient, Kuzan let out a cry similar to that of a bird.

An attack from above, will you run? Will you receive it? What will you do.

Kuzan's behaviour had exceeded Imina's expectations.

To the front——he hunched his body low and kicking off the floor, he rushed.

After the distance changed the sword didn't hit, instead, Imina had received a hit in abdomen.

"Ghh...!"

Together with the impact dark red sparks were scattered. The leaked spirit energy burst into the atmosphere.

Imina responded. As if I'd let myself be blown away into the wall time after time. The moment Kuzan poised himself to rush, he instantly turned the blade and held the sword in reverse grip. On the verge of collision with all his strength he thrust the sword's tip into the enemy's shoulder. The blade's light drawn into the body and blood bust, scattering all over.

"KIH...IIH!!"

As a result——Kuzan's right arm was torn apart and dangled powerlessly on its shoulder. On the other hand Imina was unable to stop the momentum of his rush and received damage to internal organs, falling to the floor and spitting blood. Not backwards as Kuzan expected, but forward, after sliding by Kuzan's side.

Of course, the two didn't open distance to rest.

The moment Imina landed, Kuzan turned around and launched an onslaught of kicks. Imina received them by exposing the sword's side. Along with the impact, the sword was filled with

power. Therefore, Imina flew forward adjusting the distance between them and cleaved sideways. The cutting edge cut through the gorilla-like enlarged torso muscles.

Seeing that, Kuzan let out a shrill bird's cry——the emotions he felt were already uncertain. Whether he was angry after receiving multiple wounds, he had finally grown to hate Imina, he was panicking pushed this far by a mere human, or maybe he was rejoicing as he witnessed Ellis' evocation.

His attacks have become even sharper.

Whipping with the arm that was cut off from the middle, he trust with the beak whenever it was avoided, using brute force he tackled with his body, he parried, avoided and kicked backwards. Now giving Imina any time to counter-attack, this time he used a chance he found to attack.

As he attacked Kuzan's injuries were sealed one after another. From the tip of his partially cut off left arm a bone had grew and in the middle of growing it had turned shorter, turning into a sharp point of a sword. Also the right shoulder that was cut deeply and disconnected, leaving the arm hanging on just the skin had bulged, forming new meat. There was no trace of the wound on his chest either.

Imina was both disgusted and impressed.

This guy's body is definitely abnormal.

Discarding an elf's appearance, he arranged his own body to obtain physical performance and attack power. As a result of pouring spirit energy into his deformed body he exerted high-speed regeneration capability. No matter how one looks at it, he could only be described as monster. Of course, all of it was granted to him by his evocation, the "Unique Name".

However——yes, however.

Imina avoided the kicks in the nick of time and slashed Kuzan's shoulder accumulating power in the blade. The left arm that chased after him——the sharp bone was looming in order to pierce Imina. In exchange for a graze on his cheek Imina had cut off the tip of the arm again. At the same time he bent his body low and dove below Kuzan's crotch moving behind him. Since surely, he was attacked with a kick, he received it with the sword, filling it with light.

The longer Kuzan chased after him, the more the battle had gone in Imina's favour. After repeating offence and defence in turns, Imina delivered plenty of serious wounds and the damage he received was low.

Has Kuzan discerned the reason behind that?

"I told you earlier, right? Kuzan Demiendveil."

Restraining him with a sideways cleave Imina laughed.

"My sword will reach you, I said."

"Shut up, you lowly human!"

Unable to act relaxed any longer, Kuzan started to spit abuse in frustration.

'I'll end this! Die, humannn!"

He swung his left arm far from above.

Looking by his spirit and expression it was a blow he put everything in into. Then——there was no reason to avoid.

Raising sword sideways, Imina received it directly from the front.

"Ghh...!!"

There was an incredibly heavy impact. Imina's body sunk down. His arms numbed. His entire body creaked. His knees broke down. Spirit energy's sparks were ejected from his body in reaction, crackling loudly.

Still, Imina withstood it.

He didn't lose his consciousness nor was injured, he laughed and looked up at Kuzan from under the sword.

"Wh...at?"

The bird's eyeballs were opened widely.

Why is this guy still standing, why won't his bones break, that's what Kuzan's face said.

The floor under this guy's feet——why isn't there even a single crack on the wooden floor, it said.

Right.

It was no miracle nor a coincidence. There was a reason.

Imina crudely shook off opponent's arm.

Kuzan staggered. With just that, he staggered.

"I should have told you——did you underestimate me and didn't pay attention?"

The reason for Imina withstanding it wasn't just because his body was strengthened.

While raising his sunken knees he set up the crimson sword, "Exellis".

A shine so strong dwelled in its blade that he involuntarily narrowed his eyes.

"If it reaches you once, the second one will reach deeper. And then the third and fourth time. I'll repeat it... and before long, I'll cut down your head, is what I said."

The words Imina said earlier were a suggestion.

"Also... that I'll keep up with all of you, and before long I'll overtake you."

As Imina put on a thin smile, Kuzan stared.

As to follow Imina's stare, he looked towards his own left arm.

"Wh... this, is..."

Confused, he spoke with trembling voice.

But, that was natural. His left arm that should have deformed had changed back——*back to an elf's arm with white skin.*

And it wasn't just his left arm.

Kuzan fell to his knees. His balance broke and he fell over.

That too, was natural, his right leg no longer was modelled after a horse's and only held a human's characteristics. He couldn't stand in the same way as he did in a different form.

"Impo...sible...?!!"

Although he reflexively tried to support his body with a tentacle-like right arm, but it did not work.

To move the stretched snake-like arm with several joints he needed a corresponding muscle strength. *With the transformation released he was nowhere close to it.*

"Remember. How many times have you received my sword, where have you received it?"

"It can't... be."

Indeed.

That's right.

All the locations that have returned back to original were the ones Imina had slammed in order to accumulate power.

"One strike after you turned into this form and the strike just now. Even though I hit the same tentacle of yours, why do you think the result is so different? With Ellis' evocation running in my body... you think that's enough the reason to change the result so much?"

"Then, this is..."

Kuzan gasped.

Finally——displayed in a visible form, he finally noticed.

The fact that his change was released meant the evocation was no longer active.

The evocation stopped running when there was no source to power it.

In other words,

"*My spirit power... was used up...?"*

"By my 'Crimson-Stained Water Lily'."

Ellis said that from behind.

"I have been warned by the elders not to use it without a good reason. They have detested my evocation. They feared that if it's used indiscriminately it'll lead to a calamity that will engulf the fairy folk, and that's because..."

Her breath was rough, her complexion white. She looked as if she was about to fall any time because of fatigue. But she acted firm. Because she knew that Kuzan will falter once she demonstrates it. The more she stands arrogantly, the more Kuzan will collapse.

Ellis' lips formed a curve appropriate for a daughter of Khan household,

"...my blood has the characteristic of being capable of accumulating large quantities of spirit power. Which means, that it's capable of absorbing large amounts. And can rob others of large amount of it. Can you understand now? In other words, my evocation... *it displays its true worth when killing elves.*"

"T-then, that sword."

Imina nodded to appalled and trembling Kuzan.

"Yeah, that's right."

This guy has misunderstood the characteristic of this sword the entire time. Of course, Imina had directed him to that conclusion but, the misunderstanding had become a reason for his fatal defeat.

" 'Exellis'... it doesn't convert the received impact into destructive power. It's a sword that *steals enemy spirit power and accumulates it as destructive power.*"

Of course it didn't mean that the impact on the sword was meaningless. By giving a shock to the blade, under that condition the "Crimson-Stained Water Lily" in Ellis' blood temporarily activated, so to say it was a trigger for the magical swords they have agreed on. The triggered evocation deprives enemy of spirit power on contact and stores it in the blade. The blade that accumulated power is clad in red light, the red light is converted into destructive power through the evocation engraved on top of it.

Then, by connecting Ellis and the sword, what power does it exert.

The answer is simple. Even without impact to trigger it deprives enemy of spirit energy just by touching, the amount of spirit energy stolen on the impact increases several times.

No matter how fast Kuzan sucks out the spirit energy from earth, he was absolutely unable to catch up with the speed of Ellis' blood sucking his spirit energy out. This was a genius Unique Vocation for defeating an enemy one can't match. Kuzan lost spirit energy stored in his own body. As he lost spirit energy the accuracy of his evocation also decreased. The absorption was done in extreme in the locations touched and the route spreading spirit energy died, turning the evocation itself ineffective.

Of course, it didn't end with just cancelling the change. If his body was reinforced by an

evocation, he'll weaken as he loses spirit energy. His bone density will fall, his muscle fibres will turn thinner, his reaction rate will fall——his entire body will turn into nothing but an empty shell.

"Prepared yourself? Kuzan Demiendveil."

"W... wait. Wait a moment."

The dazed bird's eyes. The powerlessly dangling tentacle-like arms.

One leg and one arm had cancelled their change halfway turning ugly.

"Exellis" had robbed a huge amount of spirit energy from his body.

While he wasn't aware of it, it was still fine. He could deceive himself with fighting spirit. Even more so if he was motivated by strong emotions. Was he frantic, he might have been able to fight for a little longer.

But, once he realized it——his strength was drained, weariness spread and he could no longer move his body. Spirit energy was the depth of the life force, a field of force that dwelled at the core of all creation. By being deprived of it, his physical strength, life force, vigour, even his will were taken away.

Not just his arm, leg and shoulder, other parts of his body also started to slowly change contours.

His transformation was being cancelled as he lost his spirit power. His horse legs changed shape. His tentacle arms began to shorten. The head a bird changed into an elves' graceful appearance.

"I-it's true that I destroyed your village. But the ones who actually put their hand to it were demons and magical beasts! And actually, I was just moving on given orders. The responsibility all lies on the ones giving orders, the soldiers are innocent, right? About this time too... right, I surrender! Surrendering is a practice of the battlefield! I admit my defeat. Like this, you won't have to take my life, right?"

As he begged for mercy, his unsightly appearance had no longer shown any pride of fairy folk.

That's why Imina smiled.

From the depths of his heart——mockingly, with grief, in delight, in rage, and then laughed leaving everything to murderous intent.

"You come in front of me... and do you really think that after having my home village destroyed and family killed, *begging for you life will have any effect?*"

"T-hat's..."

"You're the first one. Today's, my true beginning. With you as the beginning, I'll pluck you petals one by one. Then after I'm done with all six, I'll pierce through that guy's heart with this sword. Just as he pierced my sister's, just as he pierced mine."

Whether it was some deep emotion or a curse, he didn't know despite saying it himself.

His vision gradually blurred. His mother's face, his sister's face, the face of everyone in the village floated in his mind one after another.

And in the end——Shirjis' face.

"S-sto..."

"It's fine now, right? *Don't make my revenge wait any longer.*"

Imina gripped the sword with both of his hands and raised up high up. With "Exellis" shining strongly enough to blind him, the crimson flash converged on the blade displaying power of destruction.

"Help me! Plea——"

"Shut up!!"

Unconsciously screaming, Imina let out his thirst for blood.

The moment swung up blade touched the deformed head a red light turned into torrent of destruction. With a sound powerful enough to make the earth rumble, a flash had exploded making everyone who looked to cover their eyes unconsciously.

Before long the light had dispersed and silence had come——.

Kuzan Demiendveil's body decomposed to nearly dust, was crushed into powder. What remained, were only burnt marks spreading radially on the floor.

4

For a while after, there was silence.

After releasing light Imina was incapable of directing, the elf disappeared. The burnt blood and shockwave of heat burned the floor, releasing a tremendous power.

The faint sound that could be heard in the silence, was breathing of the boy who overlooked it.

Eventually, while everyone was stunned——Imina slowly fell on his knees, drooping down in place.

"Imi...na."

And, a silver-haired girl took a single step with her trembling legs.

She ran up to him with a wobbly gait.

Her face was pale and her breathing rough. While she was capable of recovering physical strength by using spirit energy , there was no way to compensate for stamina with evocation.

Still, the elf girl's——Ellis' lips formed a smile.

It wasn't just a smile. Her eyebrows were lowered, shoulders trembling, breathing rough, there were tears in the corners of her eyes. Bleeding joy from her entire body, she reached the boy,

"Imina... Imina!"

While calling his name, she hugged his head to her chest.

"...we won."

"Yeah."

Imina nodded.

"We did it."

"Yeah."

"That's great."

"Yeah."

The muffled voice in Ellis' chest was trembling.

The crimson blade——the sword made of the girl's blood, he finally let go of it, putting it down on the floor. While remaining low in her embrace, he moved his arms around Ellis' waist to embrace her.

"But... not yet."

Imina muttered. Probably not to Ellis, to someone who wasn't here.

"It's not enough, it's not enough with just this guy. I need to move further forward or I won't reach where everyone is. ...Mom, Nee-san, everyone in the village. Not yet."

"It's all right. It will be all right."

Ellis held Imina's body even stronger as he sobbed convulsively.

"One day we'll reach it... surely, we'll reach."

Staring at the two, Milifica stood there without moving.

She didn't know what was the identity of this emotion running through her body.

——Was it fear.

Frankly speaking, they were twisted.

A human boy who only single-mindedly wished for power, turning the blood of his beloved into blade, he even pierced her belly with the blade. And——despite hating elves, leaving an elven woman by his side, the contradiction of killing that woman's fellow kin while laughing with ridicule.

On the other hand, the elven girl supported him making an expression of a saint. She devoted her blood, was willing to have her belly pierced, sacrificing herself to help with his revenge. And——while being an elf, the contradiction of being hostile towards elves, moreover, killing her own blood relatives.

Calling them "twisted" was lukewarm.

What was it that stirred and moved the two, why did those two turn like this. Trembling while trying to imagine it, must be caused by fear.

——However.

In Milifica's chest, *that* wasn't all.

She was aware they were distorted. Possibly, they might be insane. Burning up their bodies for revenge alone, scorching their hearts, what was it that lied ahead of them as they scrape away their souls. The opponent was mighty, journey - endless, from the sidelines it clearly looked like it will be dyed in just pain, suffering and despair.

Also, what will remain once they fulfil entirety of their revenge. Imina's family won't return, the fact that the family of the one Ellis loves was massacred will remain. This relationship, this act, it was nothing but barren. It was better that they forget everything and live together in peace in the corner of the country.

That's how vain and dreadful the thing they were attempting to do was.

——*However.*

The other ones present——Sashtal, Laimi, Fream, they all made same expression as she did. While in fear and dread, they trembled with something even greater.

At the sight of the bloodstained embrace of the two, Milifica and the others felt *that* in their chests.

Why was it.

Why are they so beautiful——.

Noticing the lines of sight Ellis raised her face and looked at Milifica and the others shyly.

Just like a face of a girl seen on a tryst.

That's why, Milifica responded to her with a smile.

And, moving her line of sight to the boy nestled in Ellis' chest——she thought of him with admiration and yearning.

1

By the evening, Yusala Drill School's campus mourned the dead by dressing them up in caustic lime and poison.

The one who ordered that was the representative, Milifica Yusala Astozellen.

Through the arrangements Vint Culias made, the school was invaded by an elf together with demons and magical beasts. It left an irreparable scar on this drill school that would never disappear.

In other words——out of 207 students, 30 lecturers, 49 of other combined internal staff there were 89 dead, 38 missing, 18 people with serious injuries and 25 with light injuries. This tragedy left approximately half of the parties concerned with the school, considering the seventy percent of the students were sons and daughters of aristocrats, it a national-level major incident.

Although the damage to the building's appearance was minor, in a word - it was a nightmare. The corpses scattered all over the classrooms were in a state that caused people to feel terror, there were even cases where they couldn't determine their identity. It was so horrible they wondered how many of them can a person count.

All the corpses were disposed off with a *special method.*

That was caustic lime and poison.

The elven methods were cruel and wasteless. First they change a human into a demon using organic necromancy and change animals into magical beasts. Then they have demons and magical beasts attack humans, expanding the damage in a chain leading to destruction. The produced corpses automatically start to function as seedbeds for Fairy Country's plants. Where Calamitous Trees flourish, the location changes into "Forest of Elves". Once that happens there is no way for humans to recover the land. Once it's filled with highly-concentrated spirit energy humans are unable to enter that location.

In order to stop that, caustic lime, acid and poison were used.

In other words, before fairy plants have sprouted from the demon, magical beast and human corpses, the seeds were solidified in lime, burned with acid and decayed with poison. Of course, there was no way to properly mourn the corpses. Deciding to use this method and using it required a considerable resolve. It was discovered three years ago but——there was no opportunity to try it as humans didn't have access to the human corpses and apparently the village was eventually incorporated into the "Forest of Elves".

But, Milifica decided and put it to action.

If this place turned into the "Forest of Elves", elves would have an enclave within the territory of Midgalz Empire. Now that fierce battles were carried out in the nearby Great Astozellen Fortress, allowing it to be built in this place would be irreparable. It had be absolutely avoided.

Therefore, she——and the drill students have piled up the corpses of their fellow students, covered it them with acid and poison. It was a gruesome and cruel work. Stimulated by acid, the smell of blood and entrails has hung over the nearby location, the discoloured pieces of meat melted falling to the floor. Completing the treatment took several hours and there were few

students who made decent expressions. Almost everyone had a wound on their hearts they wouldn't be able to get rid of for the rest of their lives.

But Milifica's dignified attitude was undisturbed and she faced it all.

Or possibly, that attitude may have been a sign that she is no longer able to turn back.

And——when everything was over, before nightfall. About the time when the sun had dyed the sky red.

The Representative, in front of the surviving one hundred and twenty six students, had closed down Yusala Drill School.

There was no confused nor opposing people. Everyone thought it was natural. After all, the casualties have reached triple digits. Below the hill——there should be no objections from the residents of the drill city either. In general, they were all families of the school staff and the merchants who relied on theirs and the students' demands for lifestyle. Once the school closed down there was no longer any reason to live in here. To begin with, who would want something like the land that was the target of elven invasion.

However, the proposal that was said after the declaration of closing down had all the drill students gasp.

With a very serious expression Milifica Yusala Astozellen said this.

"I'm recruiting volunteers from among fellow school students. Then, together with the volunteers we shall head towards Great Astozellen Fortress, I would like to join the front as soldiers."

Even though she was royalty——although far in the line to the throne, she was Her Majesty the Princess.

Even though her own arm was injured during this assault.

Although she was assigned to the office of the school's representative, in fact it was actually nothing than just a title she received as royalty. Even looking at this incident, the post-processing and fieldwork could be left up to a secret royal military team that would arrive at later date and she did not need to attend it. The highest priority should have been to quickly report of her safety to the Imperial City.

And yet, instead of returning, she intended to proceed forward.

She had become a volunteer herself and headed to the frontlines.

Everyone was speechless. Wondering if she's insane.

Normally, the one who would stop the Princess when she started talking reckless would be Vint Culias who acted as her watchdog, but he was no longer by her side. Arrested for a heavy crime of treason, he was confined to the city's dungeon until the Royal Knights arrive.

Maybe because a human they knew betrayed her she was thinking something. Or maybe because the man she admonished was gone, her innate recklessness appeared on her face.

Most of the students made an expression that said they can't understand.

It was natural. Almost all of the ones who survived were those who *did not fight* during the assault. The first thing they did was to either escape the campus, hide themselves curled up in fear or withdrew seeing they cannot win against the enemy——that's why they didn't die and remained alive. All the brave ones, all the ones with ardour were killed by either demons or magical beasts.

"Tomorrow morning, I will leave this place. Volunteers, please come to me by then. Of course, it's nothing compulsory. This is my own... selfishness as *a warrior*."

Even if she used all of her own popularity and beauty, it was unknown if there was anyone whose heart would be roused for the prospect. However, in Milifica's words there was not a hint of inspiration, encouragement nor a will to incite them.

Even after she finished her declaration, no one raised their voice.

That's why Milifica just silently raised her hand as a signal to disband.

2

After the night had passed, the next day was very sunny ever since the morning and the ridge-line of the Mi-Nou mountains was clearly visible.

There were two hundred kilometres until the Great Astozellen Fortress that was behind the mountains.

Although it took five days with a horse-drawn carriage, on human legs it takes up to ten days. First, nameless plains spread in front of them, after that there was a mountain road. It was a quite difficult journey. Even more so considering the fatigue from yesterday's battle.

However, Ellis Endveil's footsteps were strangely light.

Of course, it didn't mean that they were unsteady because of the blood she lost. What was light was her heart. Right now——she was happy with this situation.

"Are you all right? Aren't you tired?"

Ever since their departure Ellis had asked that several times to the girl walking behind her.

"You can exchange with me, okay? I might look like this, but I'm actually quite strong."

"I-I'm all right!"

As the girl desperately shook her head her round glasses were slightly displaced.

"I-I took this out of my selfishness so I'll carry it properly."

Laimi Selea-Shutimeryl had tilted the mountain of books she held in the front carrier——while saying that with a smile.

"If you've got something hard and big just leave it to me to carry."

The big man——Fream Eiza had shrugged while pointing to his chest.

"I can't calm down seeing such a little missy burdened with such luggage. If you're tired tell me any time, I'll carry it."

"As I thought, maybe it's better to have that horse carry it?"

While playing around with the stems of Harpy Mint at the corner of his mouth, Sashtal Dei hit the horse's reins attached to the horse's snout. On top of the horse that let out a low neigh there were loads of bags for several people containing food and water.

"I think tying it with a string and hanging from the saddle would work."

"T-the books would be damaged if I did that!"

Laimi's face turned beet red, outrageous, is what her expression said.

"These aren't simple books! These are grimoires! If something was to happen while they're being rocked by the horse and by grinding against each other the spelling changes, it could turn dangerous!"

The grimoires were a special eccentric item made for inorganic necromancy usage. The evocation was stamped on a special paper using ink mixed with spirit energy and a large amount of the pages were bound into a book——or so it seemed. The evocation was triggered by detaching the relevant page with evocation. It's advantage was possibility of writing a different evocation on every page, but basically, it was disposable, at the same time another disadvantage was that it took time to find the page with the evocation one needed. It was unpopular as it was unsuited for practical use, the ones Laimi was carrying were material samples that were a dead stock in the school's library.

"No, I don't think they would."

"I have brought them out from the library with great pains... if it's spoiled by the time we arrive at the Great Fortress, what will I fight with?"

"I get it I get it, my bad."

That's how Laimi was agitated when it came to books. Even Sashtal who was good a frivolous talk had cringed.

"By the way, you, where did you pick up that Harpy Mint?"

Fream glanced at Sashtal's mouth.

"It was growing on by the road we passed a while ago."

"Tell me that earlier. I'd pick some too."

Harpy Mint was a plant with long and thin stems very similar to grass. By chewing on it one felt cool aroma and light drunkenness. In short, it was something like a cigarette that didn't use fire.

"We'll find more soon anyway, our journey is long."

"You're right."

"Isn't Harpy Mint prohibited by school regulations...?"

As Laimi made appalled expression,

"Maybe, but it was a common thing to do in my home village, and we're no longer students in the first place. There's no need to abide by school regulations any more."

With a grandiose shrug, Sashtal laughed.

And then, he called out to the woman in front as if to tease her.

"...right, Princess?"

Milifica Yusala Astozellen turned around and frowned.

"How many times have I told you not to call me 'princess', Sashtal?"

"Then how do I call you? Representative?"

"I don't mind if you call me Milifica."

And then she loosened her frown and smiled mischievously.

Not just to Sashtal, but also to Fream and Laimi.

"You two as well. To you, I'm just a comrade, just Milifica. So call me like that without honorifics. That's an order, got it?"

"B-but... um, is it no good to call you Lady Milifica?"

"As expected, calling you without honorific is terrifying..."

The two panicked at the same time.

Casting a sideways glance at it, the boy who walked next to Ellis——Imina let out laughter of amazement.

"I don't think comrades normally give each other orders."

Milifica looked over her back towards the boy——Imina, and retorted merrily.

"Oh dear, the person who has no intention whatsoever of showing me any respect seems to have

said something."

Imina averted his gaze as if troubled.

"No... um, please stop making that mean expression. It reminds me of some unpleasant memories."

"How rude, calling my expression mean. I was like that right from the start."

"No, that's not it... I mean, was your personality like that?"

"Yes. Since young I continued to do mischief despite being from royal family, doing nothing but annoying the palace staff."

"...what a thing."

Ellis involuntarily burst into laughter.

She knew why was Imina puzzled. That's because Milifica acting sly and mean was similar to a girl, who once upon a time had continued to tease her little brother.

Seeing the amused expression on her Milifica suddenly turned her gaze towards Ellis.

"Speaking of which, Ellis. You, don't you have to hide your ears?"

"Ah, eh?"

Being told something unexpected, Ellis made a startled expression.

Ellis hid the sides of her head with her hair and wore a cloak with a hood on top of that. It was normal for her during a journey in order to live as a human, also being a habit.

"Since it's just us being here, I don't mind."

"But..."

Although there was no one but them, they were on a highway. They might be passing by other travellers.

While Ellis was confused, Milifica slowed down and moved right next to her.

Gently touching Ellis' bluish hair,

"I stopped trying to do impossible. Being a princess, being a representative, refining myself... whether it's my own role or my own ideal, I burned myself and worked up with such things, without my real self in all of that, I ended up *like this*."

She lightly raised her right arm bandaged with a splint and snorted with self-depreciation.

"That's why from now on I think of being just Milifica. Of course, there will be situations where I won't be able to do that, but at least in front of you all——in front of you who have accompanied me in my selfishness I want to be just Milifica."

Her words that seemed like admonishment had also felt as if she was speaking to herself.

That's why, Ellis said,

"Okay... Milifica."

Calling her without honorifics and nodded shyly.

"That arm, I'll treat it along the way. Using light organic necromancy I can heal it without putting too much burden on a human body. *As an elf,* I'm very good at that."

"Understood, then please."

She glanced at Milifica, Laimi, Fream, in this order.

And then as if to entrust her answer, she looked at Imina walking beside her.

He nodded.

His expression, somehow——looked merry.

It wasn't just Ellis' imagination. Since she was with him ever since they were children, they spent so much time, she knew what Imina wanted to say or what he thought just by looking at his face.

She knew his expression.

It was the same expression he had when she came together with Shirjis to play in the village.

The happy and full of expectation expression he had when they welcomed their friends——.

"The wind feels really good!"

That's why Ellis untied her hair and shook her head. She felt that on this journey that was full of battles with blood and resentment, temporarily forgetting time was all right.

The tips of her ears, like drops of water were exposed, bluish-silver hair was exposed to the rising sun and shone in complex cyan-blue shades.

3

Three days after Imina and Milifica left with their company.

In the opposite direction to theirs——on the middle of the highway towards the Imperial City, a single carriage was attacked.

The cart was heavily guarded. The iron coach could only be opened by a key from the outside, there was no windows. There was a dozen of sentries around it, guarding, even the coachman and the horses were clad in armour. Of course, all the soldiers were armed with magical swords.

There were the soldiers of secret military under the royal family's direct control. Very skilled soldiers that have attained glory in the war with the southern barbarians. If compared to a private army, they were capable of facing a thousand.

However, despite that, all of their corpses were lying on the roadside now.

Some had their arteries cut, some had their heads crushed miserably, some had holes bored in their hearts, some of them had their torsos twisted hundred and eighty degrees.

The horses released from the leather belts and the vehicle excitedly stepped in place. It's not because they have seen the corpses. They were warhorses, accustomed to the smell of blood.

Feeling the presence of the girl in front of them——they were instinctively terrified.

As the girl stroked the horse's snout, a voice called out from behind her.

"Hey, it's no good to kill horses, Mikt."

The voice was also that of a girl's. She spoke while kicking the coachman's head around.

"I won't kill it. But, why? Nokt."

The girl——the one who was called Mikt asked,

"We'll plant a Corpse Seed of Origin in them. Let's leave them in the nearby village and go back."

The girl——the one who was called Nokt let out a nasty laughter.

The two had the same appearance.

Lovely facial features like a lotus that had bloomed in the grassland, the grim presence that ruined their loveliness, dark shadows under their eyes, their lips reminiscent of rotten morning glory also looked shrunken, they had sooty silver hair——and, slightly sharp pair of ears.

"Ah, good one. How many humans do you think will die trying to get rid of them?"

"It would be fun if some young women were raped too. Ku-hihi."

The elven twins merrily spoke of gruesome topic.

And, behind the two, **creaak**, a strange metallic sound had rang out.

The door of the couch that had its wheels rolled out had its lock opened.

"Ah, it's finally done."

"You're right, looks done."

Mikt and Nokt ran up to it side by side. The figure that was crouching and fiddling with the lock had turned around.

"It's done."

"We can see that."

"Yup, we can see that."

Pushing the figure aside, they opened the door.

"Hey, you alive?"

"You alivee?"

"Ngh..."

As the boy came out together with the call, the elven twins laughed jokingly.

"We came to help you. Well, it was an order so it can't be helped."

"It can't be helped. Although it's a hassle to come to help a mere human."

"You are..."

The boy——Vint Culias stood up unsteadily.

"I see, that person's..."

The twins stood in front of him and raised their skirts in a bow.

"Yes. I'm Nokt, and this is Mikt. We're one of the petals of a flower decorating the Endveil clan 'Six Petals'... we have gone all this way to pick you up. Kufu-hihi!"

Just their features were cutely, their presence and their laughter were all distorted. As if mud had taken appearance of a kitten and tried to joke around.

He was glad that he was saved, but clearly, they weren't decent rescuers.

Vint was instinctively horrified, just like the horses earlier.

However, immediately after that——the impact strong enough to cause the fear disappear completely from his head assaulted Vint. Involuntarily he look away from the girls in front, towards the figure standing behind them.

The moment he recognized *her* face, he was stunned, doubting his eyes he shouted.

"Princess...!"

It was unconscious.

He ran over by almost pushing away the twins. In there, was the face Vint couldn't help but to yearn for helplessly. It was the reason for his mind to derail, the reason to betray the Empire, the reason for his arrest——the reason behind all of Vint Culias' actions, her face.

Those eyes. That nose. These lips.

And, that hair——,

"Your hair..."

Vint was startled. She should have blonde hair that reflected the sun. But this person in front of him——this woman's hair was vividly red.

"Is there anything you need of me?"

The woman opened her mouth. That's right, a woman. She was older than that girl, about twenty years old.

Although they were similar to be called like two peas in a pod, this was clearly a different person.

"However, I am not a princess."

Her voice was strangely flat, there was absolutely no emotions in it. Looking carefully, there was no expressions either, without any emotions it felt like she was artificial.

But, Vint's voice still sounded shrill.

In front of her, who was similar to the one he loved——his heart beat very fast.

"You, your name?"

He asked with trembling lips.

She responded. As if her gears were creaking.

"I am Lady Nokt and Lady Mikt's living doll. My name is Uruha."

And she had bowed once. As if her gears were moving.

On the chest peeking out from the collar of wide-open dress, there was a small scar.

Her left breast——where it seemed like her heart was pierced, there was a thorn.

The convulsing skin was cloudy and murky red.

That colour, was reminiscent of withered poisonous flower.

Afterword

Nice to meet you for the first time, or possibly, it's been a while. I'm Fujiwara Yuu.

I have delivered "Senketsu no Elf".

As the author, I intended to challenge an orthodox fantasy series. But looking back once again at the content I feel that strangely there's lots of things like blood and entrails, I mean, the title is "Elvenblood" and it turned into something like a dark fantasy, for myself who has only written bright and colourful comedies I really worry how will this dark fantasy be taken by the world and I'm exceedingly uneasy about this, I'm sorry I lied I have never written colourful romantic comedies.

In general, I wrote it as I pleased. For those who have read my book so far, I'm going to write this book like I usually do so leave it to me. For those who read this book for the first time, don't be too defensive and just take it easy.

There's lots of individuals that subjectively like or hate bright or dark stories but, I think you need to think in terms of whether it's interesting or not! ...and so, I try to praise myself.

I'm indebted to many people for their help preparing this document.

Kona-san in charge of illustrations. Starting with Imina and Ellis, as well as Milifica, thank you very much for breathing life into the characters. Ever since I saw the illustrations in the book stores, I thought that it would be great if we worked forever from now on and I'm happy. The editor-in-charge Satou-san as well as Hirai-san. Somehow I have inconvenienced you with lots of things, in these acknowledgements I would like to express my gratitude. Thank you very much.

Also reviewers and designers, the people in each of publisher's department. Thank you for letting me make a good book.

And last, the readers, to be precise all of you who have read this book. If I have brought some colours into your life with this book, then there's nothing that would make me more happy.

Credits

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